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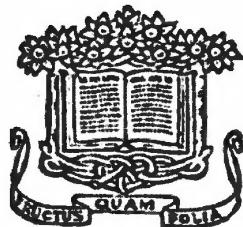
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**SOME OF US ARE
MARRIED**



SOME OF US ARE MARRIED

BY
MARY STEWART CUTTING



FRONTISPICE
BY
WILLIAM CAFFREY

DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE PURVEYOR OF THE FUNDS	3
AN OPENING FOR MARIANA	34
AS LOCHINVAR	54
LESLIE'S FRIEND	77
THE WONDER-WORKER	109
BOGGYBRAE	133
BENSON'S DAY	157
DANCE-MAD BILLY	194
CLYTIE COMES BACK	220
THE SHELL	244
CHILD OF THE HEART	272
HER JOB	291

TWO AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STORIES

THE MAN WHO WENT UNDER	315
THE SONG OF COURAGE	344



Some of Us Are Married

THE PURVEYOR OF THE FUNDS

IT SEEMS too bad that I can't go to Aunt Kit's funeral—the very last member of the old family!"

From the paper he was reading, Ben Bromley looked up yearningly at his wife, who sat by the window in a short-sleeved, pink gingham frock, shelling peas with expert fingers. It was ten A.M. on a warm Sunday; nobody was going to church, but the two small boys and little Alice were at Sunday school; the sixteen-year-old Top was upstairs employed exhaustively in the sacred rite of cleaning his gun. There was a sense of peace and space and leisure.

Early as it was, the voice of Rill's young man could be heard down below on the front piazza; the rhythmical dragging of his big heavy-soled shoes along the boards showed that he was sprawled, as usual, in the hammock, while Rill sat near it in the little green rocking chair, gazing at him, happily. It was the corner of the piazza where Mr. Bromley and his wife had been in the habit of sitting; but it was, of course, all right that things had changed. Everything was all right; but that first glow of excitement and sympathy, mingled with the bewilderment and

shock of Rill's engagement, had faded during the year into a half-irritated, even if affectionate, tolerance of the situation. Lately, however, this had been mixed with that sense of the looming prospect of the wedding of which Mr. Bromley had been hearing incessantly. Young Holman—they never abbreviated names in the Wotherspoon family—had been suddenly offered a position in the West, and it was natural that the young couple should want to be married and go out there together; but the subject was mixed with a corroding sense of inadequacy, at the present time, to the father.

Mr. Bromley's business, at first hit hard by the war abroad, had begun to show signs unexpectedly of being bettered by it; he manufactured a "side" article that was needed—he had borrowed every cent he could honestly carry, with the fair prospect of making good within the next six months; in the meantime, as he had warned his wife, they must cut everything as close as possible; he could barely get out enough for the daily needs—it simply wasn't there. How, then, was he to "come across" for a wedding, that wedding which he was never allowed to forget? He simply had no money for it.

In some miraculous way, indeed, during the past few weeks Rill had done wonders with the few dollars he had wrung out for her, running into the room after dinner, tall and smiling, with her yellow hair and sea-blue eyes, to show something lacy and ribboned, with one arm flung around Daddy's neck. Whenever his wife moved, she dropped something she

was making for Rill. The conversation wafted incessantly into yards of lace, and how much of this it took and how much of that. Ben Bromley took an anxious glance this moment at his shoes. . . . While Rill's little splendours, augmented by a couple of checks from thoughtful aunts, momentarily increased, the rest of the family showed an almost embarrassing seediness. He turned for relief to the subject of the funeral—it seemed a cool, pleasant refuge where nobody talked of clothing.

“I do *wish* I could go, Jess!” His thin, pleasant face with its dark eyes took on a hungry expression.

“Well, why don't you, dear?” she answered absently, shaking the shelled peas together in the bowl as she inspected them. “Though it seems an awfully long distance, of course; and just now, with all the expense!”

“That's it!” Mr. Bromley's brow puckered. “At any ordinary time I wouldn't have to think twice about it; I'd just go. Aunt Kit! She was pretty old, eighty-two; why, I remember her as long as I remember anything. She always gave me molasses cookies from the time when I was a little shaver and Father took me to see her. Nobody's cookies were as good as hers. She was always helping somebody—that terrible year after Father died—I don't know what we'd have done if it hadn't been for Aunt Kit; I used to go over to see her and be filled up, and when I got my first place—and lost that money. . . . She did the kind of things you can't forget. And even in these last years when she couldn't move from her

chair, she was always jolly. . . . She's been the link that kept the family together, though we'd all of us moved away but Marthe, and they two lived alone in the old house.

"She had her quirks, of course. . . . But she thought the world of having one of us come to see her. She was as proud as they're made when Copy Barnes stopped off on his way home from the regiment in China to say 'How do you do?' first. The last trip I took down in the country I was only twenty miles away, and never got over to see her—I just could not take the time. She heard of it, too! I felt pretty bad about it. I wrote and explained, and she had Marthe write me an awfully nice letter. It just seems to me that I *have* to go to Aunt Kit's funeral!"

Mrs. Bromley gave a weighing glance at her husband. He had a peculiar reverence for his own family impossible to impart to even the most sympathetic wife.

"Well, I don't know—— Of course, dear, if she had left you anything; but it seems——"

"That's all the more reason why I want to go. Henry wrote me that the only name mentioned in the will was Marthe's, and that's as it should be. She gets the house and everything—no such great amount, anyway. Aunt Kit sent us each a piece of the old furniture three years ago—I think more of that chair Grandfather carved than anything. I do wish I could go to that funeral! I feel somehow as if she'd know if I didn't."

His wife looked at him with an instant's fond admiration before her brow wrinkled.

"I'm afraid I'll have to speak to you about the wedding, dear. The date is only three weeks off—I don't know *what* we're going to do about it. Rill, of course, wants her girl friends, and even with only the relatives on both sides—the Wotherspoons have so many; old Mr. Wotherspoon was one of eleven children, you know—and just the most intimate friends and neighbours, it counts up to one hundred and nine!"

Mrs. Bromley paused, with haunted eyes. "When there are five and six in a family you can see how it brings it up before you know it, Ben; and you have to give them *something* to eat. Even if you cook all the chickens and make the salad yourself, it costs, and that's only the beginning. I wouldn't have started in for it if I'd realized what it would mean. It seems if you ask one person you have to ask everybody else, or someone's feelings will be hurt. We thought it would all be so simple. Nothing takes much, you see; but everything takes *something*."

"Why in thunder do they want to be married now anyway? Why couldn't they wait until next year, when everything could be fixed up all right?"

"*Ben!* Don't be so silly. You know perfectly well that Rill wants to go out there with Holman. She says she is quite willing just to slip into town and get married in a corner somewhere rather than worry you—it's impossible to get married privately here in a place where you've lived so long; but it does seem a pity when it's Rill—our own little, good, eldest

daughter—when she *has* a home, and it's the one time in a girl's life——”

“Yes, yes! Of course.”

“It's awfully sweet of Holman to want Top for best man—he can borrow a coat, he thinks; but the two younger boys will have to be fitted out from head to foot; and Joe tore his best trousers on a nail last week. Alice *has* to have stockings and ribbons. Rill hasn't her suit yet, and I haven't a rag for myself. You can't appear in a dress that's been made five years if you're the mother of the bride—not that I care about myself at all! And you've got to have new shoes, Ben, whether there's a wedding or not!”

“That reminds me,” said Mr. Bromley, parrotwise. His face had set, as in stone, into the wearied, yet patient lines of the Purveyor of the Funds, the real magician of modern life, continually, before the confiding gaze of a wife, conjuring from a box seen to be empty.

He abstracted a wallet from his coat pocket, and, opening it, produced a very small flat sheaf of bills, counting them out before handing them to her.

“Make it go as far as you can for what's needed at present,” he admonished her. “I don't know when I can bring you any more. I could hardly take this as it is; I felt like a thief.”

“Oh, Ben! I hate so to take it when——”

“Oh, never mind! We'll come out all right; if you've got to have it, you've got to, and that is all there is about it. But make it go just as far as you can.”

He stopped short in his walk around the room and leaned with one arm on the chiffonier, his face raised toward the leafy sky that filled the window as the words broke yearningly from him:

“I *wish*—I *wish* I could have gone to Aunt Kit’s funeral! It would do me more good than anything in the world. I feel that I’ll never forgive myself for not going!”

“Oh, my goodness!” said his wife, staring. He hadn’t been like himself lately; she divined in him some ail that she couldn’t cure. She looked at him now with anxiety, amusement, and a certain loving exasperation rolled into one. This inopportune insistence on the funeral when you usually couldn’t drag him to one! Men were so set about the things they wanted—it seemed as strange to her as it does to most wives, when a man passionately desires to do something “on his own.” But she went up to him now and put her arm tenderly around him, while with the other hand she strove to force a couple of the bills into his tightly clenched fist.

“Oh, my goodness, if you’re as crazy as that about your old funeral! Take this back again, and go. Ben! You’ve got to—— No, I won’t do as you say! You listen to me. If you think I’m going to stand your moaning about not having gone, for the next ten years, you’re very much mistaken. Ben! Open your hand. . . . Stop acting so silly!”

She had the sudden carrying power of a whirling tornado. “Stop, I say! I hate it when you make yourself look like a clown. . . . No, I don’t care

whether Rill has a wedding or not. I don't care what anybody else has; we'll manage! *But you've got to go to that funeral!* If you throw those bills again on the floor I'll tear them up into little pieces and burn them. Ben—*Ben! Dear!*"

There was a moment's silence in which he didn't make himself look like a clown.

"I'll pack your bag for you after dinner," she said happily.

It was half-past ten when he left the house to run into New York for the midnight sleeper on the Pennsylvania. Rill emerged, rosy and star-eyed, from the darkness of the piazza corner and the now doubly occupied hammock, followed by the lover to the lighted hallway to say good-bye to the traveller, Rill, as usual, clinging tightly around her father's neck—she was nearly as tall as he was—with her soft yellow hair all over his face, and young Holman Wotherspoon shaking hands with a clean, firm grip, in spite of his slender and boyish aspect. Yes, he was a nice fellow, even if he did belong to that Wotherspoon crowd. It gave the elder man a sense of irritation to see the two disappearing back to the hammock—before he was fairly off—to stay, of course, until Jess called them in.

It was with a feeling of having mercifully escaped into the open that he took his place in the sleeper. As he lay there, swaying with the chug-chug of the train, that stricturing cord wound around him seemed to relax; both business and domestic perplexities

showed signs of fading away. He had lately got into one of the pockets of life where he could see nothing but his own affairs—nothing in the world really mattered now but getting results from the business—he couldn't afford to think of anything else until he "pulled out." It annoyed him that he couldn't give way to his usual kind consideration for others—but he couldn't; he had had to send two clerks packing the day before. But he was going back to the sight of the hills, the breath of the pines, the old simple associations that were peculiarly his own, back of this present existence shared with others; it would be good to see "the folks" although, of course, there couldn't be many of them there.

He found himself smiling once or twice behind his curtains; it was more as if he were going on one of his jolly visits to Aunt Kit instead of to her funeral. She had developed more and more, with the troublous years, a cheeriness and optimism that amounted to genius. In the intervals of a pain that cursed her cruelly at times, she was always ready from her wheeled chair to tell or hear some new thing; her: "Lands! I'd die if I didn't find something to laugh at," was a familiar sound; she said, with a cheerful conviction that carried conviction to others, that the Lord helped her a lot.

She equipped her phonograph not only with baritone solos and religious quartets, but also with the latest vaudeville songs and ragtime; and after forty years of dominoes, anagrams, and picture puzzles, at the age of seventy-six learned from the young doctor

across the street to play pinochle, and thenceforth-ward defeated everyone who could be lured to a game with her. Her fresh-coloured, plump, finely wrinkled face, with the snow-white hair above it and her gray-blue eyes under their delicate arched brows, came so vividly before Ben Bromley that it didn't seem possible that he shouldn't hear the warm greeting of her tremulous old voice. He could fancy himself coming away with the usual package of her peerless molasses cookies and that rejuvenated feeling with which one always left. . . . And he needed the feeling. He yearned to be reinforced in some way. Back of all that sense of being tightly clamped into the interests of a business world, where domestic issues didn't count, was this infernal, inopportune matter of the wedding, which he couldn't lose.

He knew perfectly well that his loving wife would sacrifice herself without question for him, if need were; but he also knew perfectly well that if he couldn't provide the simple plenishings and the simple wedding for their darling daughter she would always feel, even though she loyally denied it to herself, that he had been found lacking. He should have been prepared when the time came to give his loving child her honourable due; as a matter of fact, he had never thought of it. He might rage inwardly at all this unnecessary fuss—Rill was as sweet as they were made; she would, as her mother had said, go and get married in a corner if it made it easier for him. What really touched him on the raw was that he couldn't provide for his darling girl as he

wished. He would have loved to be the hearty, generous father, loading her with benefits. It seemed at the moment a subtly additional grievance that it should be the conventional Wotherspoon family into which she was marrying.

The darkly green, deeply wooded hills were already walling in the train when he got up the next morning. As he stepped into the lurching dining car for breakfast, he gave a start of surprise—at a table facing him sat a lanky, cadaverous, but prosperous-looking individual, with a prominent green jade scarf pin, black eyes, a long upper lip, and an iron-gray beard and hair—no other than a cordially detested cousin named Boardman Skank.

“Hello, Boardman!” said Ben agreeably, to a muttered greeting from the other. “Well, this is luck for me! How are you? I never expected to see you here. I’ll take this seat opposite and let you pay for my breakfast. I’m a little short myself. Here, waiter, take my order with this gentleman’s and bring the check for both to him.”

“You think you’re funny,” said Mr. Skank, with a whitening around his thin nostrils.

“No, Boardman, I don’t *think* I’m funny, I know I am. I feel just like amusing you,” said Ben genially. “How’s the hoss trade? I understand you’re still extracting shekels from the unwary, manfully giving up the honest joy of the poor man. Going to Aunt Kit’s funeral?”

“Well, I intended to take it in when I left Danbury last evening to catch this train,” said the other. “I

got a letter Saturday from Hen Brown about the funeral; but I stuck it in my pocket and didn't read the rest of it till this morning. He says the only name mentioned in the will was Marthe's. Of course that's what Marthe has been playing for all these years."

"She deserves all she'll get," said Ben staunchly. "Besides, Aunt Kit didn't have so much, anyway. Waiter, you can bring me a couple of your best cigars."

"Well, it wouldn't have hurt her to remember some of the rest of us," said Mr. Skank, sourly, with a further whitening around his nostrils in his uneasy glance at his cousin. "Aunt Kit was as queer as Dick's hatband, anyway. I've a mind to stop off at this next town—I've got a chance for a deal in horse-flesh with a man that's aboard the train."

"Oh, come on with me," said Ben affectionately. "Don't leave me! I'm counting on you to take me over in a taxi from the station. I feel it's providential, my meeting you in this way."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Mr. Skank disgustedly, gulping down his breakfast morosely to Ben's airy converse.

Half an hour later, Ben, with true joy, saw him get off at the next stop with his horsy friend.

In a couple of hours more he was himself alighting at the little station with its immense platforms for freight, afterward slowly making his way back toward the outskirts of the older portion of the town—the funeral was not until afternoon—where the houses in the quiet, narrow street backed up against hills,

and a little stream ran under the wooden footbridge. There was a clear-washed blue sky; the sun was bright, but the pines above were steeped, as usual, in their own solemn darkness. He went thoughtfully up the ancient box-bordered path to the low-stepped doorway with the fanlight overhead and a vivid pink hollyhock at one side, beside which the crape on the doorbell showed incongruously. Yes, Aunt Kit, sure enough, was dead. But the door stood ajar; from within came a buzz of voices. The front room was of course given up to the state occupancy of the dead; but as he stepped cautiously onto the black and white oilcloth squares of the hall, a face instantly peeped around the corner—the small, delicate face of Marthe, with her slightly grayish hair and blue eyes like Aunt Kit's.

“Who’s that? For the land sakes, if it isn’t Benjie Bromley! Well, if that isn’t good; I never supposed you’d come all the way from New York. Walk right in back here, Benjie.”

“Benjie!” The old nickname made him smile; but he hastily composed his features to a decorous solemnity, a process, however, made unnecessary by the cheerfulness of the mourning party of perhaps a dozen people who filled the small rag-carpeted room, sitting in various positions of ease between the red-covered table and the brown-papered walls hung with the oval-framed photographs of the family, while the sun shone through the pink hollyhocks peeping in at the white-curtained windows. Only Aunt Kit’s wheeled chair was empty.

The next moment he was shaking hands and being greeted warmly by each one of the group; the two high-nosed Spanner "girls," nearing sixty, but who didn't look it, dressed expensively in the height of the fashion; portly Uncle El and little deaf Aunt Petra; the smiling but always speechless Hen Brown, almost a relation by the friendship of years; young James and Francis Hartley, small and eager-eyed; Lucy Ward and her lame husband, Jepson, and—could it be?—plump and pretty as at her wedding years ago, with wide-open blue eyes, little tendrils of fair hair on her broad, low forehead, her white teeth shining from her generous mouth, no other than his special girl cousin, Belle Bromley before she was Belle Higgins.

"Well, this *is* good!" he murmured, before Marthe's voice broke in.

"If you'll sit down, Benjie—the funeral isn't till two o'clock, we're to have lunch before and it's quite a little time off yet—I was just telling about it all as you came in. Aunt Kit passed away so peacefully we hardly sensed that she was gone. . . . But she'd been preparing for a long time, she knew the end was near. Before she died she gave to all the people around here who had worked for her, and the poor families in the Hollow that she always looked out for; the Reverend, he says he never had a truer helper than she. She talked about you all every day; she'd have been that tickled to see so many from a distance! I thought maybe Joe would come—but it's a pretty long way from Boston; and Min Spencer,

I had a letter from her saying she was just starting for San Francisco. But Aunt Kit told me to tell you that it would be perfectly ridiculous for any one to be mourning for her, or talk low and appropriate, when she was so *mortal* glad to go! And she wanted everybody who came to her funeral just to forget it, and act human, the same as they did any time—just as they would if she were here. She said there didn't seem anything strange to her about dying, she'd lived so much with the good Lord these last years—of course I know Aunt Kit *was* queer!—that He just seemed like one of the folks, and you know how much she thought of them! And she expected to be enjoying herself this minute more'n she'd ever done. She wanted you should hear the phonograph before luncheon—she thought the world of that phonograph!

“She planned the luncheon: chicken potpie and hot biscuit and the best peach and strawberry preserves and plenty of cream for the coffee—she cared so much for you all——” Marthe’s voice trembled slightly, but she steadied it before she went on. “She made me put that little picture of her at sixteen—right sweet, isn’t it?—on the table there, for that was the way she allowed she looked now: I’ve got to leave you and see to things in the kitchen with Mrs. Quinn; but I’ll set the phonograph going first. You men smoke if you want to, for goodness’ sake; she’d like it all the better.”

The strains of “Anchored” in a deep baritone voice were filling the room as Mr. Bromley went over and

took the chair by Belle, to meet her "Hello, Benny Ben!" as of old.

"Well, how are you, Belle? I say, this seems good. You look as young as when I saw you last—let me see, that was at Uncle Ben's funeral."

"I'm not, though! I've got a boy of nineteen, and a girl of seventeen."

"Yes, I know."

"It's a shame that we none of us ever see each other any more unless somebody's dead. Aunt Kit kept us all together! I've heard of you and your family through her and Marthe; I understand your daughter is to be married soon."

"Yes, she is," said Mr. Bromley, with a pang.

"I'd love to see Jess again and all your children. I hear that you're a very successful business man, Benjie; we're all proud of you."

Mr. Bromley cleared his throat. "Well, the war put us back, of course—it's been a trying time, this last year; but we're going to pull out fine after a while." His voice dropped. "How are you fixed?"

Her voice changed to match his; to the eyes that watched her tenderly her pretty face changed a little, too, the lines in it became marked; through its look of youth showed the imprint of time and care.

"Well, I've been teaching dancing for the past ten years you know, ever since Edward died. Rena, my girl, is helping me now; she takes my classes when I'm away. I was bound to get off to Aunt Kit's funeral—she always did one good, you know; I can't

help feeling as if she were here just the same! I came on from Camden yesterday and stayed all night. But the fact is, Benjie, I'm just a little bothered about Ted, my boy, these days."

"What's the trouble?"

"It's hard bringing up a boy without his father—Ted's as good as he can be, and he is a fine-looking boy, too, if I do say it, but—he's restless."

"He isn't going to college?"

The mother shook her curly head; she set her lips in a way that Ben remembered.

"No. Maybe you'll think I'm hard, but I thought it all out. I've seen a lot of that—mothers or sisters working themselves to the bone to earn enough money to send a boy through college; and I've never seen one case—it may exist, but I've never seen it—in which doing that paid. It seems to take something out of a boy, some grit that he ought to have. He usually marries before he has anything to live on, and naturally keeps on expecting Mother or Sister to help him out as usual, just when she expects to be taken care of herself. It seemed to me I hadn't any right to sap Ted's will power in that way; I'm not sure yet how much he has. He's clerking in one of the shops at home just now—he gets only four a week, it isn't really what he's meant for; but he'll have to find something. Sometimes I wonder if, after all, I've made a mistake."

"I think you've been dead right," said Ben emphatically. "You're a trump, Belle." He took her plump hand in his.

“Oh, if you only knew how glad I am to hear you say that! I feel so inadequate. Do you remember when you used to carry me across the brook to school? It seems so good to talk to you, Benjie; you see there isn’t any man of my own people to give me advice. But I mustn’t keep you to myself any longer now. The Spanner girls want to speak to you, and Uncle El; he and Aunt Petra came down from the farm early this morning.”

“I’ll see you later,” said Ben confidentially.

There was a little flutter in the manner of Cal and Til as he approached; both of their faces beamed under their large, thin-brimmed, fashionable hats.

“Well, to think that we have to come all the way out here to Aunt Kit’s funeral to meet you, Ben, when we live only ten miles away at home! I don’t believe we’ve seen you since Father’s funeral.”

“It’s a shame, isn’t it,” said Ben heartily.

“Of course we know your time is very valuable—such a prominent man as you have become. How’s Jessie and Rill? So Rill is to be married—she is so pretty. Cal and I ran across them both a couple of weeks ago, shopping. I suppose they told you. We want to know what Rill would like for a wedding present. I have some old silver candlesticks plated on copper that were her great-grandmother’s—I thought she might like them.”

“She’ll be crazy over them,” said Ben soberly.
“You’re too good.”

“And Til, here, wants to give her table linen—that

always comes in handy. We're going to get to the wedding, no matter what happens—that is, of course, if you mean to ask us."

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Ben hastily, with a craven sinking of the heart. He nerved himself for explanation. "But it will—er—er—it will be very quiet; we don't believe in having much fuss."

"That's so much better taste," said Cal approvingly. "I call all those big, gorgeous displays vulgar."

"Well, Uncle El, you old skate, is that you? How are you?" said Ben, turning away. "The girls and I have finished our little talk. Draw your chair back here." He flung his arm affectionately over the shoulder of the older man, as the two moved out of the circle.

Uncle El tipped his chair back as far as it would go. "Well, it did me good, looking at you just now, talking to Cal and Til. Success hasn't hardened you a bit, Ben, as it does most of your New York financiers, you've got that same kind face you always had. We've been hearing through Jim Barker what a business you're doing, and I tell you we're mighty proud of you."

"How's Jepson getting along?" Ben's eyes had roved over to the dejected figure of Lucy's husband, patiently supplying disks for the phonograph with a startlingly varied selection.

"Why, he—— Just wait a moment, the undertaker's beckoning out in the hall—— Here, Ben, he wants a couple of vases for some flowers——. Where

was I? Oh, Jepson. Well, he hasn't been able to keep his job for a good while."

"On account of his lameness?"

"No, that doesn't trouble him any." Uncle El looked around with care before forming the words soundlessly with his lips:

"Takes—too—much," and then nodded in confirmation several times. "Yes, that's what's the matter with *him*. He says he is in real estate now, and you know what that means; he's aiming to get a big commission *when* he sells the old Tait mansion, twenty-two rooms, standing empty for eight years. Huh! Aunt Kit provided some for poor Lucy before she died. Lucy never had any sand, though. There are no bequests; Marthe gets all that's left, but it isn't so much, after all. I think Aunt Kit hoped Hen Brown would get a move on and ask her to marry him now. Marthe's been in love with him for twenty years."

"Why hasn't he asked her before?"

Uncle El again looked around, and again soundlessly formed the answer with his lips:

"Slow." He nodded once more, before going on aloud: "She'd be a little mo-not-onous to me, but Hen isn't wildly exciting. Seems kinder good, all meeting like this and talking each other over, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Ben, laughing. "You're a great one, Uncle El."

"Well, if you can't slam your own folks, who can you slam?" returned Uncle El agreeably. He moved his portly figure a little nearer.

"Your Aunt Petra and I were just saying, when we heard your girl was to be married next month—we remember her that time she was down at the farm, when she was five, with those long light curls, pretty as a picture—we were saying that we'd get all the rest of the folks together—Sister Anne, and her girls, and Mary Wilson and the professor—they couldn't come to-day—and just make up a party and go to the wedding. I'm sick of only meeting at funerals; it's not more than three hours' journey from us. That is, of course, if you are not ashamed of your country cousins."

"Country nothing!" said Ben wanderingly. "We'll be honoured." He looked around in sudden desperation. "Hello, Hen, can't you find a chair? My, that coffee smells good! Here comes Marthe now."

"Everything will be ready in a minute," said Marthe. She dropped down wearily in a seat by Ben, her thin face taking on a tinge of colour as she patted his hand.

"Aunt Kit would have been pleased as Punch that you came, Benjie. She thought a lot of you. She used to say that she was terribly fond of men, the same as all old women are; they have to live with their own kind so much. . . . The little Italian child has been at the door with a big bunch of wild flowers. Aunt Kit gave her a five-dollar gold piece last week, tied up in pink tissue paper; it just tickled her to give little sums like that sometimes, instead of always having it dragged out of her!" She raised her voice. "Has any one seen anything of Boardman Skank?"

"Why, I have," said Ben, laughing. He narrated the incident of the train. "I don't think he'll get here."

"Well, I hope he won't," said Marthe feelingly. "Aunt said she was pretty sure he wouldn't come all that way—farther off even than you, Benjie—if he wouldn't gain anything by it; but sometimes she was afraid he might, to spite her, he was so mean and contrary. He did her some low tricks, 'way back, and when she sent him one of the old pieces of furniture three years ago he mailed her a bill for the expressage; she said even the thought of him messed her mind all up, and she didn't want him in the house, whether she was alive or dead. Aunt Kit was as good as they're made, but she had her quirks. If you want to go in now, Benjie, and take a look at her before I close the coffin, as she wanted me to——" Marthe's voice trembled a little once more. "Everyone else has been in."

"Yes, I'd been wanting to," he said soberly.

He slipped away into the stillness of the front room. He was glad to be alone for a few minutes by Aunt Kit, with all the world, it seemed, shut out. The sight of the ever-loving old face, with a sort of peaceful royalty in it, now brought back to him disconnected, strangely sweet impressions of his father and mother; of the little brother who had died; of the way the sky had looked to him when he was a little boy; the words of a childish prayer came unbidden to his lips. With the love for those who were gone a deep friendliness seemed to stir in his heart.

for the ones who were left. . . . When he went back to the gathered company, Marthe disappeared in her turn and came back after a brief absence, red-eyed. But she announced: "There's Mrs. Quinn. Lunch is ready. Come right in and seat yourselves. I'll set the phonograph going with 'Old Black Joe' and leave the door open. . . . She wanted you should enjoy it. Hen, go and shoo that hearse away till it's time for it. It would have given Aunt Kit a fit to have it standing outside while we were eating."

It was a pleasant, not to say a jolly meal; every sentence seemed to begin with "Do you recollect?"—in stories that Aunt Kit had loved; everyone was gratefully ravenous for the chicken potpie and the hot biscuits that Aunt Kit herself seemed to have provided for them.

Ben was opposite Belle, pale, and smiling over at him from time to time; but in private converse with James and Francis leaning over on one side of him he offered to try and get a customer for those high-priced eggs in a certain down-town club he knew of. Poor weak Jepson, on the other side, hungrily drinking in the words of the great man, was bidden to look him up and lunch with him the next week when Jepson was in town. Lucy's tearful look of gratitude repaid him, though she followed it up with the paralyzing proclamation that she would have to fix up a hat to go to the wedding. If it were not for these allusions, making him look awkward and feel cold all over! There was a pleasant warming quality in this cousinly companionship—there is nothing that re-

stores one's sense of power more than being able to help others. But the meal was over soon. The front room, as Marthe announced, was filling up with people.

"The clergyman is just arriving, so we'd better go in. The coffin's closed, as I said, but she wished her kin to be right around her. And I may as well tell you, she didn't want any peaceful hymns sung; she said she had enough of sitting peacefully in a chair for thirty years, and she wanted something with get-up-and-go to it, so we're to have 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' instead, and 'Awake My Soul, Stretch Every Nerve.' I hope you'll all sing."

As long as Ben could remember he had known that front room with its long mahogany sofa, the big, brown rep armchairs, and the large steel engravings. The sunlight played over the bunch of tiger lilies and ox-eye daisies, that the Italian girl had brought, on the stand near the window. The clergyman's voice was clear and full and cheerful, and the hymns, started by Marthe's sweet, thin voice, were taken up with a will by others. It seemed to set them all spiritedly marching to some unseen high goal.

And afterward they tramped off together, two by two behind the hearse, to the little familiar burial plot of the white church on the hill behind the house, with its old headstones and crosses, the dark pines above them, and the blue above that. And even then Aunt Kit didn't seem to be dead; her strong and loving spirit seemed so alive among them.

Ben walked back when it was all over, with Belle beside him, the wind blowing her pretty hair.

“And I’ll tell you what, . . . I’ve been thinking—you send your boy up to me next month and I’ll see if I can’t get a better place for him in town; a real opening that’ll teach him something.”

“Oh, Ben, it’s like you! But you’re too good, you—”

“I don’t see why I shouldn’t do my share; there’s nobody has more right, outside my own family, than you, Belle; you were always like my little sister. But don’t say another word; I’ll write you. You see, I’m ashamed to say that things—and people—get sort of crowded out the way I live, when one is trying to work up a business; but you must remember that I’m there just the same. I wish you were going back now in the train with me.”

“I wish so, too; but I promised to stay all night with Marthe and the Spanner girls to look over some of the things.”

“Yes, I know; everyone seems to be leaving at a different time. As I have the farthest to go I must skip as soon as I get my valise, and take the trolley over to the Junction to catch the express; if I waited till night I wouldn’t arrive till ten o’clock to-morrow and that’s too late. I tell you, I’m mighty glad I came, Belle. It’s meant a lot to me. And I feel just as if Aunt Kit knew it.”

“I’m sure she does,” said Belle. She hesitated, and then went on impulsively: “I’m going to see you and Jess, anyway, at your little Rill’s wedding,

no matter what happens, Ben, dear. Why should we wait for another funeral? As Uncle El says, the family will rally round you this time! My Rena wouldn't miss it for anything. Why are you looking around, have you lost something?"

"Oh, no," said Ben, recovering himself. That infernal wedding came up to stagger him at every turn. He had a moment's impulse to explain; but it wasn't any use. "That's fine," he said awkwardly. "It'll be a shame to go away without some of Aunt Kit's molasses cookies, won't it?"

But when they went into the house even that last touch wasn't lacking. Marthe was bending over an immense blue bowl of them on the sideboard.

"Aunt Kit wanted you should each have some of her cookies to take back with you, the same as usual," she explained. Marthe looked tired, there was a red spot on each of her cheeks. "Hen, hand me that paper and a string, will you? Here's your package, Benjie, put 'em in your valise and don't eat 'em till you're on the train. It's a mercy Boardman Skank didn't show up, Aunt Kit would have turned in her grave!"

In the bustle of farewells that followed, Ben found a chance for a word to the always smiling and speechless Hen. "Why don't you ask Marthe to marry you? She's a mighty fine woman."

Hen turned slow and inquiring eyes on the questioner; his rosy face paled.

"Do you think she'd have me?"

"Find out," said Ben, and went through the gate,

laughing, as he waved his hand back at the group on the porch, all waving to him in farewell.

It was a couple of hours more after the ride in the hurtling, bounding trolley, and another long wait at the grimy, coal-dusted station with its shunting engines, its intersecting tracks, and its vapid-eyed, shabbily clad waiting crowd, before the belated train came along. He had time to live over the day just spent, to feel to the full the glow of relationship, the pleasure of being sought by everyone, and of being of service. Yes, going to see Aunt Kit hadn't failed of its reviving power—it wasn't for nothing she had brought the family together once more.

But by the time he was settled for the night in the sleeper he began to feel the old fatigue and worry settling over him.

After all, he was going back to yards of lace, and that burden which, though momentarily lifted, was the same; nay, was the greater by the mistaken whole-hearted rallying around him of his kin. How on earth was he to write and tell them, without wounding them sorely, that they were not to come—that there was to be no wedding feast? People never believed you when you said you couldn't afford certain things.

It seemed extraordinary to him now, that he had even taken the money to come to this funeral. Some vague hope of unforeseen relief—he didn't know what, that he seemed to have been cherishing unconsciously—had vanished. Well, the only honest thing to do was to face the music. A sturdier feeling rose

in him with the effort. After all, there was nothing so terrible in giving up what you couldn't afford; it was that sneaking effort to do it at all costs that really shamed you, the keeping up to a false ideal. The household must take its cue from him now, there was no other way. Rill, bless her, would be happy in any case. Jess would know how he felt about it, he could see her heroically seconding him, as ever. They would just have to slip into town quietly, without any fuss, just themselves, and—oh, heavens, all the Wotherspoon family! Why, oh, why, wasn't it possible to cut loose from people at such a time? What was it in a wedding that was so inextricably entangling and bedevilling? Well, the Wotherspoons were sensible people, after all; you made bogies in your mind of things, and when you met them fairly they turned out to be nothing at all. And good old Uncle El, and the rest, who were making the warm-hearted effort to do him honour by rallying to him and his on this supposedly festive occasion, they would just have to be told with all expressions of regret—even though he winced anew at the thought of that concrete ill, undying snubbed family feeling—that there was to be no smallest festive occasion for them.

There was a relief in coming to a flat decision. He felt himself a man again. Long after midnight, lying hungrily awake with a brain burningly alive, he took out the little bundle of cookies to eat one, turning the packet over in his hand first and looking at it. It was like Aunt Kit to treat them all still

as if they were children. As he opened the package he saw that next the cookies was a letter from Marthe; he knew her sloping handwriting well. He turned on the light in his berth and read:

DEAR BENJIE: Aunt Kit wanted the one who came from the farthest away to her funeral to have a little gift for a surprise put in with his cookies, to show that she appreciated his coming. She couldn't give to all; I know she would have been glad you were the one to get it. She had it put to my credit before she died, with the money for the funeral expenses, so there wouldn't be any fuss or delay. I was to say that it went with her love, and she hoped it would come in real handy, and that she would feel that you could have a good time with some of it. Your loving cousin, MARTHE.

Ben Bromley sat up straight, staring with dilated eyes. Inside was a check for a thousand dollars. "Good Lord!" he said, not irreverently.

"I'd like to send fifty to Belle."

Mr. Bromley had telegraphed, with the dawn, to his wife to meet him in town for breakfast. Sitting there on either side of the little table spread with coffee and bacon and rolls, with the breeze blowing through the open window, they felt that this unaccustomed morning repast had almost a bridal flavour about it. Jess had on a white suit and a flowered hat; the colour in her face had been charmingly coming and going during this vivid recital, and the consequent portioning out of the astounding

legacy—so much for the “good time,” so much to be put away.

“And I’d love to send it to Belle,” she responded quickly. Both, in a moment’s glance as they looked at each other, saw the figure of their little Rill, robed and veiled in white and followed by her maidens, descending the green-twined stairway among the loving, familiar company of well-wishers. Father’s credit had been redeemed miraculously—he was little-Johnny-on-the-spot for his child, after all.

“It means a lot to me to have the folks come on.” he said soberly, “to be the one to bring the family together this time. Get Rill all she needs, and be sure and don’t stint yourself, dear, out of the amount; but make it just a plain, old-fashioned wedding, Jess,” he warned her. “There’s all the more reason now for going carefully with what we have. My, I’ll be glad when all this is over and we can go back to ordinary living again! Give everyone plenty to eat, that’s the main thing; but make the rest just as simple as you can; that is, if a wedding ever can be simple!”

“Indeed I will, dear,” she assured him eagerly. “I have been thinking—there are lots of things we don’t really need, Alice’s sash for instance; she can get along quite well enough with a new hair ribbon.”

Ben grinned involuntarily. Jess, whose imagination soared untrammelled as to purchase if there were no funds, always became paringly economical when the money was in hand.

“Ah, get Alice her sash!” he pleaded. There was

an unconscious reinforcement in the swift thought that the seven-year-old Alice couldn't have a wedding for at least twelve years.

He put his hand fondly over his wife's as it lay on the table, when the waiter's back was turned; his long, thin face took on an expression of tenderness as he met her pretty eyes, he had been indescribably touched by her ready acquiescence in giving to Belle—but that was just Jess every time.

"I'll never forget that if it hadn't been for you I'd have stayed at home, after all," he said. "Even if it hadn't been for the blessed trick she played on us—and of course it might have been Joe, from Boston, or Min, or Boardman Skank (horrible thought!) who got this money—I'll tell you one thing: I'd always be mighty glad I went to Aunt Kit's funeral!"

AN OPENING FOR MARIANA

IDON'T see why you can't go to the wedding, Mariana, so long as it's in the church, even if you're not invited; you can sit in the last pew. Your Aunt Lucy and I used to go to all the church weddings when we were girls."

"Oh, Mother, nobody does that sort of thing now!" Mariana, with her arms upraised, was putting on her hat before the glass.

"Well, I think these war weddings are terrible!" Mrs. Gillies's light blue eyes took on a tragic expression; they always had a certain veiled, distressed look, which appealed to the innate chivalry of men, but was not so winning to women, who usually felt that they had something to look distressed over, also, if they wanted to.

"How Mrs. Porter can let her daughter marry a man who may go off next week to be killed passes my comprehension; though I do think they might have asked you to the church! I'm sure you've been to all the Red Cross meetings. I think it's very strange—it's over six weeks since we came here, and we hardly know anybody. If you only had a different manner to people, yourself—but you hang back so. If——"

"Oh, Mother, everyone is too busy with all this

war work to think of us; you know that. Half the girls go into town every day.” She stooped over to kiss her mother. “Now I’m off!”

Mrs. Gillies sighed as she watched her daughter down the street. The mother knew how dear and funny and loving her child was, and how utterly adorable she could look in appropriate garb; but even her fiercely maternal soul couldn’t but acknowledge that slim Mariana in a khaki skirt, a shapeless brown sweater, and a black scoop hat that covered all her sweet, curly brown hair and cut off half her lovely, delicate face, would never attract a second look from any one; she hadn’t the brilliant colour which made her ten-year-old sister, Filomena, noticeable.

Mrs. Gillies had come with her two daughters from their home town in Ohio—after the fifteen-year-old Jack had been happily disposed of in a boy’s camp—with all the glow of anticipation of a delightfully social life in the new environment, during the months in which the furnished house of an old and wealthy friend, Mrs. Iverson, had been put at their disposal while she and her husband were deeply engaged in Y.M.C.A. work in France. Their son Leslie was in a far-off Southern camp, with his young wife and child near him. With the Iversons’ prestige as introduction, and the town an outlying suburb, only thirty-five miles from a training camp, Mrs. Gillies felt that here, at last, would be a real opening for Mariana; the mother cherished impassioned dreams of her child surrounded by adorers, with all the other girls eagerly courting her society. It wasn’t

that she wanted Mariana to marry, that was far from her mind indeed; but as a truly American mother she passionately wanted the girl to Have a Good Time. She hadn't married very early herself; but she had enjoyed her girlhood to the full, as Mariana had never had the chance to do. Her father's death, Mrs. Gillies's long illness, the changed conditions of their finances and those made by the war in their home town, with all the young men leaving it, had been answerable for Mariana's lack.

Summer people in a suburb are, after all, only summer people, gone before the inhabitants realize their presence. The elderly Mr. and Mrs Iverson, though citizens of weight, had represented no social centre. But apart from that, the whole place was given up to the thought and furtherance of the war. Mariana—her mother wasn't yet strong enough—made surgical dressings at the Red Cross meetings, and helped a couple of times at a canteen in a neighbouring town frequented by the soldiers from the camps. The girls whom she met were pleasant and civil enough, but no one made any particular overtures. Mrs. Gillies, unfortunately, had nobody "in the war," and took interest in it only under protest, as Something that interfered with Everything.

She had taken the unwilling Mariana on a too-expensive automobile trip to the training camp, only to see an array of tin-roofed barracks and a few khaki-clad soldiers straying around!

But this military wedding, with all the ring and stir of it in the air, had brought matters to a climax as

showing the futility of expecting any opening for Mariana here. Bravely as she bore her exclusion, the girl was, the mother knew, lonely.

The tears came in Mrs. Gillies's eyes, thinking of all this, as she sat on the piazza later in a fresh muslin dress, with her fair hair prettily waved; Mrs. Gillies always got herself up becomingly.

The carpenters were hammering away in a near-by house, the town seemed to be full of subdued stir; there was to be a local parade for the Red Cross Drive in the evening. Boy scouts were already passing. The people were also beginning to appear from the wedding reception, in couples and groups, eagerly conversational.

Mrs. Gillies rose as three women unexpectedly came up the steps, the older one—purple-gowned, stout, gray-haired, and fine-looking—she knew as Mrs. Brentwood, with whom she had a bowing acquaintance.

“How do you do?” said Mrs. Brentwood pleasantly. “This is Miss Wills, Mrs. Gillies”—she indicated a tall, angular lady—“and Mrs. Chandor.” Mrs. Chandor, charmingly arrayed, was pretty and gentle-eyed; her smile was warming. “We really must apologize for not having called on you before, Mrs. Gillies, but you know yourself just how busy everyone is these war times. We just stopped now to see if you would like to contribute something to our Red Cross Drive to-day.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. Gillies brightly. “Won’t you please sit down here while I go in for my pocket-

book? Oh, what is the matter with this screen door, the bolt has slipped again—I *never* saw a house with so many bolts and catches on everything!"

"Mr. Iverson was very much afraid of burglars," explained Mrs. Brentwood.

Mrs. Gillies hastened back to draw her chair up to the politely waiting group.

"I can only give a dollar, but I know that my daughter will be very glad to contribute her little share if you can wait a few minutes; she will be home directly."

Mrs. Brentwood smiled assentingly. "Why, certainly. Thank you so much for your donation. We've just come from such a lovely wedding; you've heard about it, of course—only intimate friends were invited. Kitty was a dream, and Captain Hike, he isn't exactly what you'd call handsome—but he has such a fine, resolute expression. He expects that the regiment will be sent over next week. The best man, that young Lieutenant Blackmore, is handsome, but he is so shy he couldn't seem to talk at all. He's staying to-night with the Prices."

"Those shy young men sometimes come out quite surprisingly," suggested Mrs. Chandor.

"I think these war weddings are terrible!" exploded Mrs. Giles. "If *he* goes to the front she may never see him again."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Chandor. "There's something big back of it all, now, it isn't just a matter of new silver and mahogany and Living Happy Ever After; Kitty and her captain will belong to each other

no matter what happens. They'll have had *that*, anyway."

There was a silence. Then, "My nephew's in the war," said Miss Wills, rising. "The dearest boy! He is only a private, but he writes the cheeriest letters from Over There. We *must* be going. I've got to stop and see about that poor girl with the sick baby—her husband is wounded."

Not a word about Mariana! Or herself either, for that matter. Mrs. Gillies watched her visitors depart with a feeling of bitterness. But hope revived as the Price girls passed with that Lieutenant Blackmore. They would certainly meet Mariana! One of the girls would stop and speak to Mariana, and—what more natural?—ask her to join them for the evening.

Mariana's slight figure was already coming up the path.

"Well?" said Mrs. Gillies eagerly.

"Well," responded the daughter. "I've been reading at the library."

"Didn't you meet the Price girls with that officer?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Didn't they ask you to come with them to-night?"

"Why, Mother! No, of course not. They hardly know me at all, they just bowed and passed on."

"Well, of all the places! I never saw such people." Mrs. Gillies was fairly trembling with agitation. "Nobody cares here whether you live or die! But I suppose you hardly looked at those girls yourself,

Mariana. You have such a strange manner sometimes. . . . If you would only wear your hair a little looser; but you won't even put on your pink hat."

"Oh, Mother!" flared Mariana. Then her tone changed. "Here, for goodness' sake, don't get so excited; you'll be sick again. Now smile at me! . . . Mother, you're a perfect infant about some things—it's time you grew up! Why should anybody think of us? They're occupied with far more important things."

"I think this war is terrible!" moaned Mrs. Gillies.

"Mother, I made up my mind while I was out. I'm going to call up Cousin Kate to-night, and get her to come and stay with you for a week while I go off and try to get a war job in town like the other girls."

"Oh, Mariana! I can't stand Cousin Kate, she fusses over me so."

"You *need* to be fussed over. I'm going in to town to see that nice old Miss Crossley who has the welfare diet kitchen; perhaps she'll let me help her for a few days."

"Oh, Mariana! In a kitchen! I think it's terrible." Mrs. Gillies's voice faltered, and then took another sharper tone of woe, as Filomena appeared, indescribably dirty as to her chubby cheeks, hands, knees, and raiment.

"Filomena! How did you ever get yourself looking like that? And all those people passing! What will they think of us?"

She called to her older daughter, already half way up the stairs.

“Mariana! Mariana! Please give Filomena a bath, and change all her clothes; she looks perfectly terrible! Oh, my goodness, what I go through with my children!”

II

MARIANA, on the floor above, after the regeneration of Filomena, sat by her dressing table brushing out her hair. Mariana had lovely hair—it had a vitality of its own, springing out into wide, goldy waves where the brush touched it; her mother’s anguish at its concealment was pardonable. It seemed to caress her milky white neck and the bare arms from which the kimono sleeves fell back. Her little bare feet were thrust into straw sandals, preparatory to changing to white stockings and slippers.

The sisters, despite the difference in their ages, had held not unsympathetic converse; Mariana had laughed at the younger’s account of slipping off the curb into the newly oiled dust of the street—and being picked up by a “perfikly splendid” young officer, the best man at the wedding, who was crossing over with the Price girls. “He had the nicest mouth. I wouldn’t have minded a bit if he’d kissed me when he thought I was hurted, but he didn’t, he only smiled—he had sparkly eyes—and said, ‘Run home, little one.’”

As Mariana finished brushing her hair, she made her plans. The big room was touched with the shadows of the late summer afternoon; the intermittent sound of preparatory drums came through the

window. Not being asked to the wedding had made her realize afresh how "out of it all" she was. No one knew how lonely she had been! But poor Mother must have a rest from agonizing about her for awhile. She would come home each night, of course.

It gave her a queer sense of hitherto unknown power to think she could do anything "on her own." She had heard once that if you really had the will to strike out in a new path, a way would be opened for you, even if it were not the one you had sought—it was the effort itself that counted. "I'll get my suitcase out of the attic now," she decided, with a quick clinching of her purpose, and ran up the stairs.

The sky-lighted garret was piled high with heavy old furniture and trunks, only a small space at the end under the rafters being left for the extra belongings of the tenants; the bags had been placed by a tidy maid on the high, narrow shelf of a small, shallow closet built in between the chimney and the side of the house, and evidently intended for valuables by the burglar-fearing Mr. Iverson; the extremely heavy, thick door, which stood open, had iron bars across the inner side.

As Mariana dashed in, her arm upraised for her suitcase, she felt the flying end of her kimono catch in something, and gave it a quick tug, without looking around; the next instant, with the sound of a slight metallic click, she was enveloped in pitch darkness. She had pulled the door, with its burglar-proof combination lock, fast shut.

Mariana's fingers groped wildly to find a knob—

but there was none. There wasn't, of course, even a keyhole. The edges of the door fitted so tightly to the sides and the bottom that one couldn't find where they were. She pounded frantically on it and called as loudly as she could; somebody, of course, would hear her in a few minutes. She bruised her soft hands against the iron bars; after long, panting pauses to rest, perforce, she pounded and screamed again. . . . Everybody must be out. . . . Mariana began to feel sick and dizzy. . . . She wondered how long the air would last in there—but probably that was all right. Why was it that no one would hear her?

Downstairs, Mrs. Gillies had been happily entertained by Filomena, who, having hung outside the church with the other children, proved a mine of information regarding the wedding party and guests. It was an hour only slightly marred by the renewed knocking of those carpenters somewhere—so late, too!

“Yes, Mandy,” as the coloured maid appeared in the doorway, “we're coming. Mariana!” she called at the foot of the stairs, “dinner's ready.”

The meal progressed with no sign of the missing one. Filomena, going upstairs finally for her best Teddy bear, let out her voice in a shriek.

“Mother, come here!”

“What's the matter?” Mrs. Gillies almost flew to the scene.

“I don't know where Mariana is! Look here—there's her hat and sweater, and her dress laid out on

the bed, and her brown shoes and her white slippers on the floor. She isn't taking a bath, for I looked."

"Oh, my goodness! The Germans have got her!" moaned Mrs. Gillies. She clutched a chair to stay her trembling limbs.

"Mother! how could they?" Filomena gasped; perhaps Mother was right.

"Don't ask me how they do anything! They're too terrible for words." She suddenly heard something from above. "That noise—it can't be the carpenters now; it seems to come from our attic!" She flew down the hall and up the steep back stairs. "Mariana, my darling, are you here?"

Mariana's voice carried with an effort through the thick door.

"Yes, dear; yes, my darling child! Mother's here with you. Everything will be all right. Mrs. Chandor has a paper with the combination written down. Mrs. Iverson wrote me that she left it with her."

Mrs. Gillies hurtled down to the telephone.

"Oh, Mrs. Chandor, we're in trouble—my daughter Mariana is locked in that closet in the attic—the one with the iron door! If you'll look up that lock combination that Mrs. Iverson gave you to keep—Oh, thank you!"

It was only fifteen minutes, though it seemed as an hour, before she ran to the door to meet the footsteps hurrying up the walk. But it was the slim, dark-eyed Mrs. Bannard instead of Mrs. Chandor.

"Mrs. Chandor is looking for the paper," the vis-

itor announced breathlessly. "She just telephoned me to come to you. She's afraid her boy took it to cut up into ships when he was sick last week. But Miss Mariana is going to be all right; you mustn't worry a minute! I called up Mrs. Roberts—here she is now—her cat was locked in that closet once. Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Gillies. We went to the locksmith, but he is in the parade to-night."

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Gillies helplessly. "There's the telephone."

"I'll answer it; you sit down here," said Lucia Bannard.

Agonized telephoning from Mrs. Chandor clinched the fact that the paper with the combination couldn't be found. Hardly was the receiver hung up, when it rang again—this time it was to say that Mrs. Paxton, who had been telephoned to, would find a Man with an Axe. Hope revived in Mrs. Gillies' breast.

Soon Mrs. Paxton arrived, piloting the axe-bearer himself, a quite splendid young fellow in his officer's uniform of olive drab.

"This is Lieutenant Blackmore, Mrs. Gillies," said Mrs. Paxton.

"Is it the little lady I picked out of the mud to-day who is the prisoner?"

"No, it's her sister, Mariana," said Mrs. Gillies weakly, gazing up at him.

"Oh, *Mariana!*" said the lieutenant, as if he had always known her. "I'll bring the child down to you in a jiffy. This the way?"

He went loping up the stairs. Those below could hear him tramping down the attic to where Lucia and Filomena were keeping guard.

"We haven't heard a sound in there for the last ten minutes," said Lucia. "She must have fainted . . . Mariana!"

There was no answer.

Lieutenant Blackmore was examining the door; he shook his head. "No good to try to chop into this."

He stepped back to take a view of the surroundings and then whistled softly.

"Well, if this isn't just like the fool things people do—build an iron safe in an attic, with nothing but rafters above! It'll be as easy as cutting cheese. How do you get on the roof from here? Oh, down at the other end—I see!" He was stalking off, and then came back hurriedly to say:

"I think you'd better both go down to the mother; tell her not to get frightened when she hears a noise—I'll sure have little Mariana with her in a few minutes now."

"Very well," said Lucia.

As Lucia and Filomena disappeared, Lieutenant Blackmore, the axe over his shoulder, mounted the ladder and lifted the skylight. Another instant and he was on the roof in the brilliant moonlight. It was flat where he was, with the chimney at the slope of the eaves. For a moment he stood still, the breeze lifting the loose locks on his forehead. From the distance came the sound of shouts and cheers mingled with the notes of the band; the procession

was on its way. He suddenly saw himself where he so ardently hoped to be going, Over There, in another week. He was glad—yet with a pang, quickly suppressed—that there was no one belonging to him to care. Then his eye located the exact spot he had marked from below. He planted his feet firmly, with his back to the chimney, and plunged the axe into the shingles; ripped one off, and then another—they fell with a clatter to the ground below. He was a little too much at one side.

“Don’t be frightened, little Mariana!” he called cheerfully; but there was no sound from within. Another ripping and tearing, and the moonlight poured down upon her.

She lay there, a wonder, white as pearl, her eyes closed, her curling hair spread out around her bare neck, her soft arms stretched out straight at her side, her little bare feet crossed. She was so beautiful, and so different from the child he had expected to see, that he turned dizzy and breathless from the shock. Then he let himself down cautiously into the narrow space and bent over her.

The rush of incoming air revived her; she opened her lovely eyes and smiled into his dark ones. . . . How long does it take for people really to know each other? Some have lived through long years of married life, strangers always.

It might be only for a brief moment that the eyes of these two met, but in it they were removed from time and space, so that each could see distinctly the soul of the other——

Then he lifted her in his arms.

She whispered something, and he put his cheek against hers to listen, for there was the noise of running up to the attic within. He barely heard her breathe:

“Have you really come?”

“Oh, you bet I have!” he whispered, and called out very loud: “Don’t come up on the roof, any of you! Stay away from the ladder. I’m bringing her down; she’s all right.”

On the roof all the world was nothing but moonlight, and they two a part of the moonlight between earth and heaven. Mariana’s eyes were closed once more as he held her to him.

“You darling, you darling, you darling!” he was murmuring—“you darling!” His lips touched hers—a wholly indefensible proceeding.

It was, after all, but the briefest interlude before he had her at the end of the ladder, swaying on her bare feet, supported only by his encircling arm, in the midst of an acclaiming group.

“Her mother’s on the floor below,” said Lucia Bannard. “I’d no idea the girl was so lovely as that—why, she’s adorable!”

“Oh, my darling child! And in *such* a state! My darling child, such a sight!” This, of course, was Mrs. Gillies’s voice.

Lieutenant Blackmore, entirely unnoticed in the intimate reunion of the mother and daughter, was already half way down the lower stairs; no one saw his start or heard the muttered “Gosh!” at the glimpse

of a room at the end of the hall filled with people who had heard that the Gillieses Needed Help. He made a sudden deflection out of the side door just as a further deputation, including the Price girls, came up the front walk in the moonlight.

“And I didn’t even thank him!” moaned Mrs. Gillies. There was a great buzzing of conversation, and an inspiring smell of coffee from the kitchen, where Mrs. Paxton was presiding.

Mariana herself, in her best white silk négligée, her hair tied back with pink ribbon, like a schoolgirl, white stockings and slippers on her feet, sat pillowed back on the big davenport, with Edna Price and one of the Gardiner girls on either side of her, holding her hands, and an admiring circle drawn up in front. Mariana was smiling as she talked, but she was still pale; there was a look in her eyes as if she were not really there, even now.

Whenever the screen door opened, Mariana glanced up expectantly.

“Oh, here is Elinor Chandor at last! And, did you *ever*—Aunt Mary, too!”

“I insisted on coming with Elinor,” announced the last comer, who was white-haired and stout.

“Thank you so much,” said Mrs. Gillies.

“I have brought around a little box of tablets,” said Aunt Mary, “prescribed by my own physician, which I have found very useful in cases of shock. I nearly gave one to a young soldier I met just around the corner by that empty house—he was behaving so oddly, without a hat and talking to himself. His

head was turned away, and I distinctly heard him say: 'Why, in h— (men will be men, my dears), can't they go? Why, in h— can't they go?' I suppose he had reference to our troops being sent to France. When he looked up I could see he wasn't intoxicated—he was a very handsome boy. I said at once, 'Are you suffering from shock?' and he said, 'I sure am. Yes, madam.' Then I asked him, 'Is it painful?' and *he* said, 'Oh, no, madam!' And then Elinor came along and he jumped back into the shadow. The war does such strange things to our boys, doesn't it? My dear Miss Gillies, no one would think you had been imprisoned so long, you have such a lovely colour!"

"We must be going back, it's getting late; we only came for a minute to express our sympathy," said Mrs. Chandor.

"We must be going, too," said Mrs. Paxton.

There was a tremendous clattering on the walk; the door bell rang. Through the screen door one saw the moon shining down on a company of Boy Scouts, drawn up, with the fourteen-year-old captain, straight and rosy-cheeked, as spokesman.

"We heard that you were in trouble," he announced. "They said there was a young lady locked up in here, so we came to see if we could help get her out."

"Thank you, she is out," said Mrs. Bannard.

"I want to thank him, too!" called Mariana.

"She's some pippin!" he announced to his comrades as he rejoined them.

The company within hastily followed the Scouts, with tearful thanks from Mrs. Gillies.

“I never knew of so much kindness, never!” she protested. Lucia Bannard remained behind. But hardly was everyone out of sight when the sturdy ring of heavier footsteps was heard outside. This time the pioneer of the troop was the big, blue-coated and helmeted chief of police, who rang the bell with the formula: “We heard that you were in trouble here, so we came to ask if we could help.”

“Everything is all right now,” said Mrs. Gillies. “Thank you so *very* much! Please come in and let my daughter thank you, too.”

“And what was the girl like?” asked the man nearest the chief of police.

“She could have *me*!” said the latter, entirely as a complimentary figure of speech, he being the possessor already of a wife and five children.

And hardly had they departed when the feet of marching men still once again broke the silence; the Home Guard, on its way, also, from the parade, had stopped to send in a deputation comprising Mr. Brentwood, Preston Chandor, Donald Bannard, and the wealthy Mr. Heriot.

“Come right in!” said Mrs. Gillies. “You’ve heard that we were in trouble and came to help us; such kindness—such goodness from everyone!”

“God bless you, my dear child,” said Mr. Brentwood, bending over Mariana in fatherly wise.

“And, oh, Donald!” called Lucia. “I’m going to stay for the night. I’ll be home to breakfast, though.”

There was a ringing cheer from the Home Guard when the good news reached them.

It had grown very silent in the room now. Mrs. Gillies was going around picking up things, and putting chairs to rights. She had turned out most of the lights; the moonlight streamed in through the still open screen door. Mariana sat on the sofa, her feet touching the floor, her head bent a little forward, her lips faintly parted; when her mother asked:

"Don't you think you had better go to bed now, dear child?"

She only shook her head and said, "Not just yet, Mother. Don't talk, please."

A swift step came up the quiet street, light yet firm.

Lieutenant Blackmore stood outside the screen door in the moonlight, tapped on it lightly, and strode down the hall into the room, a gallant figure of a young soldier, his dark eyes deep with love, his lips——

Mariana rising from her couch, white as pearl in the moonlight, came forward to him.

"Isn't it *terrible*, the way this war goes on!" said Mrs. Gillies.

She and Edna Price were standing by a snowdrift though it was spring by the calendar.

"Lieutenant Blackmore's regiment has really sailed for France. Mariana will be home to-morrow. I knew you'd want to hear."

"Yes, indeed," said Edna.

Mrs. Gillies drew her cloak around her. Her small, delicate face had lost its harassed look, her eyes were full of eager light.

"I'm so glad I got off all those comfort kits for his men before they left the camp. When I think how I felt about Mariana's marriage—after only three days!—it did seem such a terrible opening for her—and here they've had all these months in the South together.

"I must go in and see about the fires. Mrs. Parker is still with us. I wouldn't let her take the children back to that cold house yet; Mr. Iverson had laid in so much coal. You have to do what you can for people in these war times, when they're in trouble. She hasn't heard from *him* in three months! When I think of Mariana—Mariana is so brave!"

There was a moment's pause. Edna Price kissed the little woman before the latter went on:

"Isn't it *terrible* the way some people act as if they didn't want to think about the war? Why, when you have any one in it—I feel sometimes as if they were all fighting for us, not far away at all, but right out here, in this street—in front of this house—and I just can't do enough to help!"

AS LOCHINVAR

ALL through the fifteen years of their married life Mrs. Laurence had cherished a secret longing that some day Will would surprise her by carrying her off bodily, as it were, from the toil and tangles of her household labours—like a domestic Lochinvar—while she thrilled at his forcefulness.

It had been a broiling day. As she sank down in the big chair in the shaded corner of the piazza after her fourth journey to the cellared ice-box since dressing, she hoped fervently that nothing would disturb her rest for an hour or more, until Will and his guest, young Mr. Sains, for whom the cold dinner had been preparing all day, should arrive from the train. Delusively cool and fresh as she looked, in her white gown with the long coral beads that contrasted so effectively with her dark hair, she felt both hot and exhausted.

She had a somewhat guilty consciousness, indeed, of having worked with a foolish intemperance—she had been on her feet almost constantly since she rose.

It had been in direct disregard of her husband's advice that she had let the maid off on her two-weeks' vacation—after the fourteen-year-old Robert had gone to camp—with the hazy idea of having

a free, restful time alone with Will. She felt now that she had had no idea that the weather would be like this, or of the place that ice-box would play in the scheme of things.

And Will, with the best intentions, was no help at all. It had often been a wonder to Mrs. Laurence how he ever achieved the cooking and dish-washing he bragged so much about on his fishing-trips, he was so inadequate at home! Perhaps she was too capable herself to welcome suggestions from another—perhaps, also, her strictly feminine directions didn't always have that clarity which is necessary for the enlightenment of the masculine mind.

“Isn’t it scorching!”

Mrs. Laurence started, and looked up to see a large woman in a faded muslin, ironed all askew, her black hair strained with fearful tightness from her pleasant face, who had halted in passing.

“Oh, Mrs. Stone! Won’t you come up?”

“Thank you, no. I’m in a hurry to get back. Pahpa came home early this afternoon”—Mrs. Stone referred to her husband, not her parent—“and I’ve been down to the village getting some screws and a nut for the wringer—he’s fixing up everything in the house; that man is such a comfort! By the way, I just met Mr. Bailey, and he tells me his wife’s much better. I don’t think there’s anything the matter with her, myself, but laziness, though they say he’s perfectly devoted to her—won’t let her raise her finger for a thing. It was so hot this morning that I washed out five white sweaters, ironed Susy’s ‘Peter Thomp-

son,' and made ice-cream. I spent most of the afternoon in the bath-tub."

"I wish *I* could have," said Mrs. Laurence longingly. "Just as soon as I begin to take off *anything*, somebody comes to either the front or back door; it's simply maddening. Will wanted me to stay in bed this morning—as if I could! Such ideas men have! What do you think, only last night I asked him to leave two milk-tickets out—they're in a jar in the closet—and I found them on the kitchen table this morning. As I told him, I supposed, of course, that he knew they were *always* left on the little shelf inside the outer screen door. I haven't been able to get a drop of milk to-day, though I telephoned all over, but I managed with a little that was left. And after getting his breakfast ready I ran upstairs to finish dressing, and when I went down again he had never got the rolls out of the oven at all, though I told him especially that they were there—he had just looked in the coal range, and never thought of the gas-oven."

"Oh, you should have trained him better," said Mrs. Stone wisely, as she went on her way. The helplessness of Mrs. Laurence's husband was a fruitful theme of conversation when the matrons of the neighbourhood met, not for the stereotyped times of uplift, but for those confidential moments when you talked about what really interested you. It was considered that Mrs. Laurence was allowed to live entirely too much on her nervous energy.

The latter now languidly watched the form of her

neighbour as she went down the shaded street. The next instant Mrs. Laurence had dragged herself to her feet in horrified consternation. Up the short path to the house came a very old, little, black-bonneted lady, supported by a large and florid middle-aged one, who carried a suitcase—her wide, pink-flowered hat rakishly askew over her anxious countenance. The former was the oldest member of the Laurence family, whose advent was usually heralded weeks before and to whom the highest consideration was due.

“Why, Aunt Neely! and Cornelia too, on such a day! You must be nearly dead.”

“Don’t say a word,” groaned the one designated as Cornelia, assisting her parent up on the porch and into the chair Mrs. Lawrence hastily brought forward, sinking down wearily herself on the top step, as one who has not strength to go farther.

“Mother *would* come! She set her mind on seeing Will. I don’t know how I ever got her here, I knew from the beginning what it would be like. I’ve got to put her to bed at once. Mother, don’t you try to talk. Even the janitor said to her: ‘Mrs. Higbee, up here in this nice cool flat with the wind blowing in from the river, you don’t realize what it is down on the pavements, let alone the hot country, all cooped up in trees!’ But you know what Mother is; nobody can stop her when she makes up her mind.” Miss Cornelia’s eyes filled suddenly with tears. “She hasn’t any consideration for me at all, not the least bit. She never thinks of the anxiety she causes me.”

"You are all worn out," said Mrs. Laurence compassionately, with an anxious glance at the little old lady, who lay back in her chair, motionless, yet with eyes that winked a sly, indomitable suggestion from her wrinkled face.

"I'm so sorry you feel ill, Aunt Neely."

"She doesn't hear you. I had *no idea* that we would have to walk from the station. Of course, in town, there are so many ways of riding. I think if I can get her to bed, dear, and keep her on a milk diet—a glass every two hours—she'll get straightened out by morning. I'm sorry to be such a trouble."

"Oh, no trouble at all!" said Mrs. Laurence earnestly. "I'll go and get things ready for you. I haven't any maid at present—but it's no *trouble*!" She would have been disgraced in her own eyes, as well as in those of Will's family, if anything for Aunt Neely's comfort were neglected.

When the visitors, after much fetching and carrying and toiling up and down stairs, were finally settled in their room, fortunately got ready for Mr. Sains, Aunt Neely safely in bed, bolstered up high with pillows, and Corny in airy négligée beside her waving a large palm-leaf fan in her fat, bare arms, Mrs. Laurence made her way laboriously cellarward for the initial glass of milk. With fresh sinking of the heart she realized that there was none. She had an indirect foreboding of calamity, as if her future fate were inextricably tangled in this shortage—but she caught up a pitcher, and ran breathlessly out

of the house down the back way past half a dozen summer-closed homes, to where Mrs. Stone stood in her garden, picking green tomatoes, while the sound of Mr. Stone's industrious hammering came from within.

"Oh, Mrs. Stone! Could you possibly spare me a little milk? My husband's aunt, a very old lady, has just come out unexpectedly from town, and the journey has upset her."

"I should think it would," said Mrs. Stone coldly, straightening herself up. The Ridge, as a residential section far removed from the small trading centre, had its obligations. Mrs. Stone was usually among the readiest to fulfil them. She would have willingly sat up all night with a sick neighbour, but there are times when to borrow milk oversteps the mark.

"We have only a very small quantity ourselves—after making ice-cream. I was saving what we have for the creamed potatoes for dinner—pahpa is so fond of them—but I suppose I *can* spare you a small cupful." She was going into the house as she spoke, Mrs. Laurence herself following.

"No, no; don't give it to me!"

"Oh, yes; take it," said Mrs. Stone dispassionately, pouring a small quantity of the fluid into the pitcher. "Pahpa'll have to get along with boiled potatoes. I suppose you know you can sometimes buy milk from Mrs. Anderson, in the brown house next the red barn, if you go for it yourself."

"Oh, thank you; thank you so very much!" said Mrs. Laurence, and, conscience-stricken, made off

wearily with her pitcher. Whatever breeze might have been had died out; the land lay smothered in the dead heat, her skin from head to foot was damp with it; a strange, swaying dizziness possessed her—and then, fortunately, went. She took a postal card from the letter-carrier as she reached her own door, and stopped a moment to read it. It was from Blanche, her sister-in-law, in her usual telegraphic style:

DEAR NAN: Have concluded make visit to you this month instead next, as dentist sails Europe—Alps, Italy—on first. Bertrand needs work on jaw. Arrive, both boys, Wednesday.

BLANCHE.

P. S. Have sent two packages parcel post.

Wednesday—good heavens, that was to-morrow.
“Nan!”

A cautious voice from over the stairs seemed to hint at scanty clothing.

“Yes, Corny, I’m coming. Wait till I get a glass. Here I am! How is Aunt Neely now?”

“Well, she isn’t much better. She felt the lack of air. I took out the screens, dear; I know you won’t mind. Mother couldn’t breathe with them in.” Corny stopped, and gathered herself together as one who feels a duty laid upon her. “Nan, I do *not* see *how* you stand the mosquitoes here. Of course, I know that the janitor said that we must expect them, but I had no idea they were like *this*. I’ve killed a dozen.”

"Well, of course, if you take out the screens," said Mrs. Laurence belligerently, and then stopped short. What was the use? She bent over the bed where the old lady lay, helpless, but bright-eyed still.

"Can't I do anything for you, dear Aunt Neely?"

"I'll be all right, dear," whispered the invalid.

"I hope Will will get here soon—she misses the janitor," said the daughter feelingly. "Mother likes to have a man around; we depend on the janitor for so many things. And this is the hour when the janitor's children all come in to see Mother, and get their nickel—there are five of them, like little steps—five now, but we think, Mother and I—"

Corny paused significantly.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Laurence hastily. She conceived an aversion to further confidences as to the janitor and his family.

"Is the milk all right?"

"Well, it's a little thinner than what Mother's used to. Of course, in the city we get nearly all cream; as the janitor says, 'Mrs. Higbee, it's well worth the extra price you pay for it,' and so it is."

"Yes," said Mrs. Laurence dully. She felt as if some strange web was spinning itself around her. She was so stupidly tired! But it was six o'clock already and she must begin to think of supper—and more milk! As she ran downstairs now she all but collided with her husband's tall, dignified figure in the front hall. His gaze, which had an undefined anxiety in it, relaxed as it met hers.

"Hello, Nan!"

"Oh, Will, I never was so glad to see you! I'm just ready to drop. Where's Mr. Sains?"

"We came out with Roofer, in his brother-in-law's car; they've gone for a little spin. Roofer'll be here for dinner, too. D'ye mind?"

"I don't mind anything since you're here. You'll have to help me out. Oh, Will, I've just had a card from Blanche saying she is coming out to-morrow—of all times—with the two boys, instead of next month, when I'd invited her. She wants to have their teeth attended to. But isn't it just like Blanche! I'll have to try and get Mrs. Cooley to help me."

"Why do you let her come?"

"Why, what else could I do?"

"I know what I'd do—send her a telegram telling her you can't have her. She'd do it to you!"

"Oh, Will, I can't be rude! She knows we have plenty of room. Besides, she has sent on some things by parcel post."

"All right, have it your own way. You asked me what to do, and I told you."

"Ah, don't speak to me like that, dearest!"

Mrs. Laurence put her arms around his half-reluctant shoulders, and leaned her head against him. "I haven't told you all! Will, Aunt Neely and Corny are upstairs."

"No!" His arms instinctively closed around her.

"Yes," Mrs. Laurence paused solemnly. "They came out for the night; Aunt Neely wanted to see you, but the journey was too much for her. Corny

has her in bed; Corny's in despair. I don't know how she's going to get back to-morrow. You'd better go up and see them."

Mr. Laurence whistled. "I will in a minute." He sat down suddenly, pushing another chair toward his wife. "You'd better sit down, Nan, you're so tired."

"Oh, Will I can't, I've too much to do. Is there anything you wanted to say to me?"

He nodded, looking at her thoughtfully.

"Sains wants me to go off with him to-morrow camping for a few days, up at White Vale." White Vale was a lake some forty miles back in the country where there was a fishing cabin and a boat. "I thought I couldn't get away from the office, but it seems that I can. The only thing that stood in the way was leaving you alone. But if you're going to have Blanche and the boys——"

"Oh, go, of course, I'll be all right," she said shortly, going off to the kitchen while he mounted the stairs to Aunt Neely. She could hear the warmth of Corny's greeting, and even Aunt Neely's thin, tremulous voice; Will was the star.

Mrs. Laurence after all these years of wedded life was still girlishly in love with her husband. For her, his presence made the world. It was always a pull to have him go off on one of his fishing trips, though she herself spurred him on, because they did him so much good. She had her secret heart-rewarding in the fact that she always seemed to look very nice to him when he returned; he made her a partner in every exciting detail.

But to be left now with Blanche and the two boys was almost too much to stand. She nearly burst into a foolish fit of crying; she was so tired, and wanted so much to be taken care of, even though, paradoxically, she could never let him take care of her!

While Will was upstairs, and after telephoning for milk unavailingly to the closed shops, she perversely slipped out of the door, and trudged painfully the half mile to Mrs. Anderson's, next to the red barn across the track, instead of sending him for it, thankfully paying twenty-five cents for the last bottle Mrs. Anderson had.

That problem was settled at any rate; no matter what was to come. It was so hot, perhaps Blanche would not start after all. The parcels had not yet arrived—encouraging thought!

Mr. Sains was a charming young fellow, small and fair; Mr. Roofer was small and dark and equally charming: Slender Mrs. Laurence, in her white gown and coral beads, had a feminine attraction to be felt by any man; together, the couple, light of foot, started hither and yon in assistance to her as she purveyed the dainty and appetizing cold meal; taking dishes from her hand to plant them triumphantly on the dining table, pretending to stab themselves with the silver forks and dancing solemnly in exaggerated postures during the intervals of service, with a stave of mock opera thrown in for variety; while the master of the house, appearing at last from the upper regions, made several

ineffectual journeys to the ice-box, bringing up the whole crockful of butter instead of the plate of butter balls his wife had meant when she said "the butter," and cracking such a small bowlful of ice that she had to go down herself surreptitiously to supplement it.

After all her careful arrangements so that she wouldn't have to cook anything at night, at the last moment she had to light up the gas range, after all, to make toast and scramble eggs, while the kettle sent forth a rising cloud of steam; Corny, it appeared, possessed a digestion that could only assimilate warm food when the thermometer was in the nineties.

Now that night had fallen, Aunt Neely was becoming restless, so that Corny felt she couldn't leave her; Mrs. Laurence herself stumbled upstairs with the tray. Everything one touched seemed sticky with the heat—through the close, hot darkness there was a muttered roll of thunder. Corny loomed large and tragic in a kimono of interwoven crimson storks.

"Mother wants to get back to-night," she appealed to Mrs. Laurence, "in the state she is now! Why, she can't sit up. She can't hear what I say. She misses her own bed—and it's so dark and gloomy outside it frightens her, dear. The moon is always so uncertain in the country. The city is so cheerful with all the electric lights. Will insisted on putting back the screens so there isn't a breath of air. Mother! Don't you move—stay where you are. I think she

looks very bad—she can't hear what I say. Now if we were in town the janitor could go out and get her some ice-cream—that always does her good; but the country is so inconvenient! I hope she isn't going to have one of her turns."

"Oh, I hope not," responded Mrs. Laurence anxiously. She was thankful to get downstairs again in more cheerful surroundings, even though the air was stifling, and to be escorted to her place at the table by both young men. The crabs, the salad, the iced coffee, the sandwiches seemed to be as much appreciated as she hoped they would be; she herself couldn't eat.

"This tastes fine," said Mr. Sains.

"I should say so," chimed in Mr. Roofer.

"I tell you what," continued the cheerful Mr. Sains, "the ride'll be grand to-morrow night, back over the hills, won't it, Laurence? Always cool up there!"

"Is Mr. Roofer going, too?" asked Mrs. Laurence.

That gentleman shook his head mournfully. "No, the firm's too stuck on me—can't bear to part with me for an hour. Isn't it tough luck?"

"Awful to be so necessary," said Mr. Sains, deftly flipping a biscuit across the table. "I can just hear the cool water lapping on the cool rocks to-morrow night, with the cool dew falling and the cool breeze rustling through the trees, and the cool fish jumping in the lake—Roofer, stay on your own side, you'll annoy the lady with your rude manners. Dost thou like the picture, Laurence?"

"You bet I do!" His countenance changed sud-

denly to one of anxiety. “Now where are you going, Nan?”

“Just down to the ice-box for Aunt Neely’s milk.” It was hard to keep the tears out of her voice.

“You sit still. I’ll see to it.”

He emerged from the cellar in a couple of moments with the glass in his hand. “No use taking this up, Nan; it’s sour.”

“Sour! That’s impossible; I brought it in only an hour ago. What have you done to it?”

“What have I done to it! Ah, look here, Nan, that’s a little too much. What *could* I have done to it?”

“No, no; of course not—the thunder must have turned it. What shall I do?”

“I’ll run over to the Plaisteds, if you like, and borrow some—they’re home; they are sure to have plenty.”

“Go for milk to the Plaisteds!” Mrs. Laurence’s face flushed. “Really, I don’t understand you sometimes, Will—after the way she complained of Robert——”

“All right, do as you please,” said her husband carelessly. “I was only trying to help you out.”

“Now, don’t you worry, Mrs. Laurence,” said Mr. Sains engagingly; “we’ll take the machine and hunt you up some milk, see if we don’t.”

“It’s awfully good of you, but everything is closed!”

“Oh, we’ll find something open,” said Mr. Roofer in a tone that carried a significant strain of conviction with it. “Why don’t you come out with us for a

little spin, Mrs. Laurence? The air would do you good."

"Yes, why don't you?" seconded her husband.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly—with all these dishes to clear away—but thank you just the same." The perverse spirit of self-sacrifice filled her. "You go with them, Will. I'll be here if Aunt Neely wants anything."

"All right; we'll be back in a few minutes," he assented with an alacrity that gave her a pang, but as he reached the door, following after the others, he turned and came back again with an anxiety in his eyes that seemed unwontedly to gauge her. When he spoke there was an appeal in his voice not unmixed with sternness.

It brought back to her in a flash that time, five years ago, when she had insisted, in spite of his expressed command, in papering an attic room herself, ceiling and all, rather than have a man to do it; Will was always foolishly ready to spend money. He had been really extremely angry when he came home and found that she had fallen off the ladder and fainted, and strained her back. He had hardly spoken to her all that entire week that she lay in bed afterward—it took all her unwearying charm to bring him round. There had been a thrill in doing it—a sense of danger well escaped—but not to be incurred again. If he had left her more to her own desires since, she had tacitly been more temperate in her use of them. That hint of stern offence was in his tone now as he made the appeal which more than any other rouses the defiant ire of womankind.

“Why do you wash the dishes now, Nan? Why don’t you lie down and rest a little first? We’ll all help you when we come back.”

“*Leave the dishes!*”

He was spared the rest of her hurtling reply, as a man stamped heavily up on the porch, bringing into view at the door two disgraceful bundles, from one of which, in immigrant fashion, protruded a boy’s heavy shoe—the parcels from Blanche!

“They had no street nor number on ‘em, ma’am—” so like Blanche!—“and they went to Mr. Lawriston’s by mistake. He’s after sending me around wid ‘em.” The newly arrived Lawristons lived in the big marble house with the terraces—pretty looking bundles to go there!

“Thank you very much,” said Mrs. Laurence, while her husband searched for more suitable reward. Blanche *was* coming after all!

When the men all left, Mrs. Laurence flew to her work, after a weary journey upstairs for Corny’s tray. The dishes in her competent hands rattled into the pan of hot suds and out of it, washed and dried and put away, while the heat clung to her sickeningly.

As she was finishing, Corny’s anxious voice came down once more from above.

“If you’ll bring up some hot water, dear, I’ll give mother a footbath. In town, of course, there is always plenty of hot water in the faucets, but here——”

“I’ll heat some at once.” But when she finally

lugged up the steaming pailful, she found Corny in tears.

"I think you'd better telephone for the doctor at once, Nan," she insisted. "I can't do anything with her!"

Mrs. Laurence rushed madly down again to find on telephoning that the doctor was off on his vacation; she might call up Dr. Giddings. It seemed hours as she stood there, stifled in the dark closet, waiting for the wire to be free, and when she did get it, waiting and ringing fruitlessly for a response. Evidently no one cared at Dr. Giddings's this hot night whether the telephone rang or not. "I'll try again later," she said to the deeply disapproving Corny—the janitor, it appeared, could always get a doctor. She had to explain, after all, that Will had gone for more milk.

And *how* long they were gone! Just like those boys to forget all about time when they got off. Everything seemed to crowd in on her now. She wouldn't wait for Will's help. She brought up cracked ice from the cellar; she dragged the big rocking chair with the arms from another room so that Corny would have something in which to sit up all night; she fetched and carried, making up a bed in Robert's room for Mr. Sains—she would have to see about the arrangements for Blanche in the morning. Aunt Neely might be ill a long time. She could hear Blanche cheerfully saying that *she* didn't mind how upset things were! She could feel everything piling, piling up on her while Will was off on

his fishing trip—— Ah, that was the rub! She was suddenly possessed by an hysterical sense of injury; she was doing so many things for everybody, and nobody was doing anything at all for her; no one cared how tired she got, though she was trembling in every limb and could hardly see.

“Oh, here you are at last!” she almost wailed as she ran out on the porch at the chug-chug of the motor. “I thought you would never, never come!”

“You don’t know how far we had to go for this,” said her husband, placing the bottle of milk in her eager grasp. “We burst a tire coming back, besides. Take care, don’t drop it.”

“We cheered wildly out in the street when we finally got that bottle,” said Mr. Sains. He and Mr. Roofer assisted her in, one on either side, affectionately. Her shaking fingers poured out a glass of the fluid while she hurriedly explained the state of things.

“Corny is frightfully worried—she’s afraid Aunt Neely is starting in for a long illness.”

Mr. Laurence looked at her frowningly. “Well, I don’t know what you’re going to do—really! I’ll take this up, and see about things.”

“Very well,” said his wife. He grew dim before her eyes. “Did you—did you only bring *one* bottle of milk?”

The three men stared at her blankly.

“Why—you didn’t tell us to bring two, did you?”

“No, no; of course not,” she rejoined in haste. Why did a man always have to be told so particularly?

Why couldn't he ever use his judgment? Why must you always have to explain *everything*?

"I tell you, it's the hottest night I've ever known," said Mr. Sains candidly, wiping his forehead with a moist handkerchief. He put out a damp coat sleeve ingenuously for inspection: "Feel me! It'll do Laurence a world of good to get off to-morrow, Mrs. Laurence; he's been working too hard lately. Nothing like a fishing trip to let the air in on you—it's a complete rest, body and mind; you shake off everything that's troubling you. I can hardly wait, myself, till to-morrow. You look tired out, Mrs. Laurence. Don't get up, let me put that bottle in the ice-box for you."

"No, no, I'll just run down with it myself. You wouldn't know where to put it," she returned hastily, in the unconscious wooing of her fate.

She really hadn't known how dizzy she was. She hurried down the steep cellar stairs, and threw open the door of the refrigerator. As she did so, the bottle fell from her lax hand, splintering with a loud crash into fifty pieces, while the milk, in a white rivulet, meandered across the cellar floor.

The next instant, Mrs. Laurence pitched forward, struck her head against the edge of the open door of the ice-box, and went down in a heap.

For some time afterward she seemed to open her eyes at occasional intervals with a hazy impression of lying out flat on the parlour sofa, with something cold on her head, and Mr. Sains fanning her while

Will put something down her throat with a spoon, and both gazing at her with eyes of deep concern. After a while that queer, blurred feeling in her head began to leave her, and turn into a comfortable drowsiness, that held her pleasantly inert, through all the strange sounds that reached her. There seemed to be a tremendous amount of heavy running up and down stairs, and footsteps tramping unaccustomedly around, and the telephone bell ringing, and a jumble of voices, now raised loudly, now whispering in consultation, and more tramping of feet—noises that persisted endlessly; then the sound at last of a motor whirring away, and afterward silence—a silence that suddenly made her wide awake. She half raised her head, and her husband came over from the other side of the room and sat down beside her.

“You’ve had a good sleep; you’ll be all right now,” he said, with evident relief, as he smiled at her encouragingly, patting the hand that was half tangled in the coral beads. He looked very big and kind and dear. “You gave us a sure enough scare—I managed to get Dr. Giddings on the ‘phone at last, and he told us to give you this.” He indicated some medicine in a glass on the table near. “I think we can get you up to bed soon.”

“Oh, Will!” she struggled to sit up, and fell back again. “I’ve got to see about more milk for Aunt Neely.”

“No, you don’t have to; lie still; she’s gone!”
“Gone!”

“Yes.” He began to laugh. “By George, trust Aunt Neely for getting her own way! We’ve got her off to town in Roofer’s automobile. I carried her down and put her in, while Sains brought Corny and the bag.”

“Aunt Neely—at ninety—gone off in the car—to-night!”

Mr. Laurence nodded. “I tell you the old lady was as gay as a bird. She’s worth ten of Corny any day. We telephoned the peerless janitor—and he’s to have everything ready for them at the other end.”

“Oh, Will!” She clung to his hand. “I can’t believe it. But where is Mr. Sains? Has he gone to bed? Has he clean towels in his room?”

“He can go without ‘em, if he hasn’t. No, he hasn’t gone to bed. I’ve something else to talk to you about besides towels.” His gaze bent on her thoughtfully. It had something in it that puzzled her—it was as if she were but an object in a road down which his attention was directed further.

“Sains and I have been fixing up things together. We’re going to take you off camping with us to-morrow. Now, don’t you say a word: you’re *going*. The house can take care of itself for once! We’ll get the 2.10 train and have the drive at the other end. It’ll be moonlight when we reach the camp. You’ll need all the warm things you’ve got—Sains and I brought down all the suitcases I could find in the trunk-room, and I got your sweater and thick skirt and heavy shoes out of the closet—I knew you’d want them. Sains is stuffing them in now, and you

can tell us what else to forage for. We want to get some of these bags closed to-night."

"But, Will!" Mrs. Laurence was sitting bolt upright in horror—he and Mr. Sains packing *her clothes*!

"I carried down a couple of pairs of pink-rimmed blankets—they were the thickest ones—and rammed them into one of the old telescope bags; the nights would freeze you up there. Sains and I have it all figured out—he is going to borrow a small tent."

"But, Will, those are the best blankets!" Mrs. Laurence's voice rose piteously. "You can't take them!"

"Well, they're warm, aren't they? That's the main consideration now. You haven't anything to say about it anyway. This is my show, and I'm running it."

"But, Will, Blanche is coming to-morrow!"

"No, she isn't. As soon as Sains and I made our plans, I sent her a night letter—he suggested it—and told her you wouldn't be home. So that's settled. What do you say? Well, I don't care whether she forgives you or not; that's the least of my troubles; and I telephoned Mrs. Stone, and she says she'll send the Cooley woman over here first thing in the morning. She'll be here herself later. Sains and I will get our breakfast in town. I'll be out before noon; I've got to stock up with the food. I'll cook you a steak in the open to-morrow night that *is* a steak."

"But, Will—I wouldn't take a *steak*! That's so

troublesome. Don't you think canned pork and beans would be handier for you, dear? Don't you think——”

She stopped short. Mr. Laurence transfixed her with his irate eye.

“See here, Nan! Who's doing this? I may not always know what *you* want, but *I* know what *I* want when *I* go on a *angling* trip, and *I* don't need any one to tell *me*! Remember that. This is none of your housekeeping rackets! When *I* hit off my own bat *I* know where *I* am. You're going with *me* this time, dear; understand?”

His clasp softened the severity of his tone. With his last words he smiled down at her, a peculiarly sweet and radiant smile that somehow seemed to lift her out of her counted-on estate of wifehood into the special honour and intimacy of a boon companion of the wilds. In spite of the natural struggles and dismay of a woman and a housekeeper, Mrs. Laurence felt a wild, unbelievable thrill; after all these years her Will was really a *Lochinvar*!

LESLIE'S FRIEND

IT WAS late in an afternoon, while the new parquet flooring was still distractingly in process of being laid downstairs, that young Mrs. Iverson, leaping from plank to plank across the hall to the telephone on the landing, heard her husband's voice at the other end:

"Hello, Win! Is that you?"

"Yes, dear." She could almost see his fair hair and sunny blue eyes. "Wait until I try to close the door; the hammering is something fearful. There!" She pushed the receiver again under her dark locks. "Aren't you coming home to dinner?"

"Yes, indeed! I'm going to bring somebody out with me—somebody you'll be glad to see—Della Bosby; she used to be Della Forrest, you know. I took my meals at her mother's the first couple of years I was at Amherst—before Della got married. Her father was awfully good to me. When I went out to Chicago, Della was living there. Oh, she heard a lot about you afterward! She's always wanted to know you. . . . Yes; she's here now from Indianapolis, overnight, with her boy, a fine little chap of six or seven. . . . I took them out to lunch and I've been looking up some people for her since. I found she was timid about going to a hotel;

so I've asked them to come out with me. That's all right, isn't it?"

His tone had a disarming confidence in her approval of his unexpected invitation.

"But, Leslie!—the floors—it's all so upset!"

"Don't you worry about that; Della says she doesn't mind a bit. You don't need to make company of Della; she'll turn to and help you. We'll just picnic. Will see you soon, dear. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," said Winifred mechanically, with a dazed look around as she dropped the receiver.

All the furniture of parlour and dining room was jammed into the hall, or on the piazza. Two conversational men hammered in the midst of curly shavings, while one in the dining room, whistling between his teeth, pungently shellacked. Leslie had breakfasted that morning on this narrow landing of the stairway, with the slender piano stool as a perch for his tray, while Winifred purveyed coffee and bacon through the swing door of the kitchen; there was a delicate feeling that Minna, the new Swedish maid, did not fall in with the exigencies of the situation as whole-heartedly as she might.

Leslie had an abounding sense of hospitality—his friends, from all over the earth, were sacred; but heretofore they had always been men.

"Oh, you're here!"

The swing door that led from the kitchen opened, and the slender figure and charming face of Mrs. Silverton appeared, with the ample form of Mrs. Roberts, in purple velvet, just behind.

"The front seemed to be all blocked up with furniture; so we came around. The maid told us to look for you."

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Winifred, flushing indignantly. "But I'm awfully glad to see you, anyway. Come upstairs, where we can talk in peace."

"We've only dropped in to bring you the concert money for the Relief Fund. We can't stay," said Mrs. Silverton, the two, however, following Winifred's lead and seating themselves on the flowered lounge of the chintz-hung sitting room, the floor of which was littered with the toys of three-year-old Matilda. Mrs. Silverton glanced swiftly at Winifred, on whose face the large, marble-like brown orbs of Mrs. Roberts were already fixed.

"Is there anything the matter?"

"No, nothing; except that Leslie—I don't know what he was thinking of!—just telephoned that he's going to bring out a Mrs. Bosby, an old Amherst friend of his, with her little boy, for the night. She's on now from Indianapolis."

"Oh, Indianapolis!" said Mrs. Roberts, nodding sagely as though the fact covered some ulterior meaning. "Yes, I see! People are so literary out there, I suppose you can't expect much of them. It does seem a little odd to come on a man's invitation, doesn't it?"

"Oh, but I've always heard that she was very nice," protested Winifred eagerly. "I do think it's a little odd for her to be willing to come—with a child, too!—when Leslie told her about the new floors;

a woman ought to know what that means; but she only said she didn't mind the inconvenience at all. Of course a man never realizes."

"Oh, my dear! There are any number of people who don't mind how much you're inconvenienced if it suits them," said Mrs. Silverton tragically. "But we're not going to stay another minute if you've got to get ready for company." She gave Winifred an affectionate little tap as she jumped up. "My dear, don't look so intense! It never pays to take too seriously what a man does. If I had taken Edward Silverton seriously I should be in my grave now, after five years!"

"Well, I believe in making husbands see when they have been thoughtless," said Mrs. Roberts meaningly, with a careful precision of speech.

"Oh, they may see; but they never own that they do," said Mrs. Silverton, laughing. "They may be awfully nice to you afterward, to make up for what they've done—but they never, never own up to anything!"

II

THE little table in the cleared-up chintz-hung sitting room had been festively laid with the rose-bordered china and the pink-shaded silver candlesticks some time before the guests arrived; the meal, though limited necessarily, was of the best—mushrooms plentifully bestrewed the steak; the creamed potatoes were *au gratin*; Winifred's mother, Mrs. Brentwood, on being hastily appealed to, had sent over a small

freezer of chocolate *mousse* that had been destined for her own board; Leslie would be pleased to have his guest honoured on her one night's stay. The lower floor was at least wrapped in silence—even little Matilda was in bed—when Winifred, in the pretty coral gown that set off her dark hair and eyes, ran down at last at the sound of Leslie's step, to greet a short, veiled lady.

"Here we are, Win—Della and the boy, and all. She wants to go straight to her room, first."

"Yes, indeed! I'm very glad to see you, Mrs. Bosby. You'll have to step on these boards to reach the stairs. Will you come right up?"

"It is very good of you to have us," said the visitor, in a sweet, low voice. "I trust you won't take any trouble for us."

"Oh, no! This is your room; I hope you'll find everything you need. As soon as you're ready we'll have dinner—just across the hall here, you see."

"Well?" said Winifred to her husband interrogatively when the two were alone together.

He put his arm round her.

"Well, I've had a day of it!" He smiled down at her with sparkling eyes. "Gee! Della is a little woman, but she's had me on the jump. She got into town about eleven; she telegraphed me to meet her. I tell you she was glad to see me; she kissed me right there in the station before she knew it! We've been trying all the afternoon to locate a lawyer who once drew up some title deeds for her mother; I think we're on his trail now. She's come on about some lots

in Brooklyn that she hopes to get money from; it may keep her here for three or four days. I told her I knew you'd like to have her."

"Three or four days! But, Leslie——" Winifred's arms slipped away from him. "With everything in such a state——"

"Oh, you'll get along all right," he said reassuringly. "She'll be out nearly all day anyway. You see, she can't leave the child alone in a hotel."

"But why doesn't her husband see to the law business?"

"Hush! Don't speak so loud; she'll hear you—these walls are so thin! That's just it—he wouldn't raise a finger to help her. So she got a pass and came on herself. To tell you the truth, I think he's a bad egg; I only saw him a couple of times when I was out there—he seemed all right then; but she can't even buy a winter coat, he keeps her so close. The thin suit she wears is all she has, and that's why she's trying to raise something on the lots. She doesn't say much about him, but you can see that she feels pretty badly about it. Rough, isn't it, dear?" He bent over to kiss his wife again. "I'll help you carry up the dinner things, Win. Ah, here comes the lady now, and my young friend, Major. Well, Major, what do you think of it here?"

"I like it!" said the little boy in a singularly sweet voice like his mother's, jumping up and down lightly.

He was a straight little fellow in a blue Russian blouse, with dark eyes and close-curled dark hair, and a great contrast to his mother, who was a short,

plump, but graceful little woman with a round face, a large waist, and small, plump hands. She had a snub nose and a large mouth; her large, well-opened eyes, which had a vague, abstracted expression, were of the palest blue; her hair was a light drab; and her skin, which was opaque rather than pale, added to her general effect of colourlessness. Even her lips were a pale pink; but when she smiled, as she did now languidly, she showed very white though large teeth. Her brown travelling skirt, of some silk and satin weave, and her handsome white lace waist, though slightly rumpled, had an effect of elegance borne out by her silk stockings and buckled pumps, the little gold-mesh bag she carried, and the many sparkling rings on her small fingers.

"I hope you'll excuse my not changing to another waist; my head is very tired," she announced in a low, plaintive voice. "I can never sleep on a train and I have been doing so much since I reached town."

"Please don't apologize," said Winifred warmly. "Leslie, will you show Mrs. Bosby her seat?"

"Now you two girls mustn't be formal; you're to be Della and Winifred to each other," said Leslie, beaming on them both.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bosby. "I was afraid I shouldn't be able to come to dinner at all, Mrs. Iverson—I had such a pain in my arm; but Major rubbed it out for me—he's very clever at it." Her smile rested for a moment pleasingly on the child, who responded proudly with a nod.

"I always rub her out," he announced. "Mother may I have some olives? Mother, may I have some olives? Mother, may I have some——"

"Be quiet, Major; you will be helped in your turn," said his mother languidly. "May I ask whether there is a window open anywhere? I thought I felt a slight draft. My throat is delicate. Thank you!"

"Does Winifred look as you expected?" asked Leslie. Mrs. Bosby bent a blank gaze on her hostess.

"Not at all. My nerves have been in such a state lately—— Mrs. Culver, one of our wealthiest women in Indianapolis—I wish you could see her home!—says she never knew any one with such a highly nervous organization as I have. You don't know what it was to me, Mrs. Iverson, when I saw Leslie's dear, kind face, and knew that, at any rate, he was the same true friend that he had always been! I have gone through so much."

"Ah, now—now! You mustn't talk like that," responded Leslie cheerily, yet with a half nod at Winifred, which seemed confirmation of depths of sorrow. "I don't know any girl who was ever more popular than you, Della. Do you remember——" The college Past flooded in, Winifred being necessarily left high and dry on the bank; though Leslie occasionally, with gallant effort, strove to throw a grapple in her direction.

The little boy was charming and well behaved, though he had a way of stretching out his small hand slyly and with lightning rapidity abstracting salted

almonds or olives, with a roguish smile when his eyes met Winifred's. The latter smiled in return.

"I have a little girl; she's asleep now, but she'll be very glad to see you to-morrow," she said aside to him.

"I like little girls," he agreed gravely. "They give you half their apple."

"Oh!" said Winifred, laughing.

"Is Mr. Iverson your little girl's papa?"

"Yes."

"My papa is awful fond of me!" he confided. "That is why my mamma can always get what she wants. My papa and mamma fights terrible, Katie says. Katie is our cook. We had a nautomobile, and Papa sold it; and Mamma cried."

"Oh!" returned Winifred, staring, before turning to answer a question of Leslie's, with a side glance at Mrs. Bosby, who was consuming all the good things set before her, but without any apparent interest in the act; even when passing her plate afterward, on Winifred's invitation, for a second helping of Mrs. Brentwood's delicious *mousse*, she remarked that it never made any difference to her what she ate.

After dinner she disappeared, going to her room to unpack her bag and put Major to bed, while Leslie and Winifred hurriedly conveyed dishes and débris to the lower regions, to the sternly disapproving Minna—never in any house where she had lived had there been company at such a time!

When the sitting room was finally set in order Mrs. Bosby reappeared, with a bundle of papers in her hand.

"I've been trying to make out these, but my brain gets very tired," she announced in her gently plaintive voice. "You don't mind my asking Leslie to look them over with me, Mrs. Iverson?"

"No, indeed!" said Winifred cordially, making way for the two on the flowered lounge, where the table, with the lamp, would be in front of them. She had a vague impression, as Mrs. Bosby glanced round, that the latter was rather disappointed because the surroundings were not more affluent.

Winifred tucked herself into an armchair, with a book, and after a while went to sleep to the continued slight rustling of papers and the low, monotonous sound of voices—woke up and drowsed off again; repeated the process, and finally jumped up with the lightsome proclamation that they would all be better in bed.

Even then Mrs. Bosby stood in the doorway, with her hand on the jamb, ready to pass through, but not passing through for an hour more, talking to Leslie, with an occasional word from Winifred. It was after twelve when they separated.

"You must be tired," Winifred said to her husband.

"Oh, not a bit of it!" he protested. "What do you think of Della? Fine, isn't she! She thinks you're wonderful—so sympathetic; that's what she needs—sympathy. If I could tell you all she's been through—she doesn't talk about it, of course, but that husband of hers—— Why, she doesn't dare leave that child behind when she goes away! It's the only hold on him she's got."

"Hush! Don't talk so loud, Leslie; Mrs. Bosby will hear you!" said Winifred nervously. "Do you realize that I've got to carry up the dishes now and set the table for breakfast?"

III

IT WAS rather a relief that Mrs. Bosby asked whether she might have her breakfast in bed; a tray was an easy matter.

Major, however, appeared, fresh and smiling, to the great delight of the little, fair-curled Matilda, who neglected her own cereal while he ate dramatically for her benefit with large wavings of his spoon and snapping bites at his toast; afterward he sat down on the floor by her and built railroads with blocks, keeping her delightedly absorbed.

Leslie had hurried tersely through his meal to the sound of hammers below; so many things had to be left undone yesterday. And just now when, even through the war depression, the much-needed business was starting up a little! To Winifred, it always seemed as though when business was better all care should cease, but it served to make Leslie even more preoccupied.

It was a couple of hours later when the guest appeared, ready for her journey into town, round-faced and pale-eyed but with that subdued effect of elegance in her appointments; she did not look like a lady who was suffering from lack of funds.

"But is your jacket warm enough to-day?" Winifred queried incautiously.

"It is all I have," said Mrs. Bosby, in a tone charged with quiet bitterness.

"I hope you slept well."

"Thank you; I seldom sleep, but I rested," said the visitor. "Is that your little Matilda? She doesn't look like her father, does she? Well, Major!" A charming smile lit up her face as the boy ran to her and put his arms round her neck. "Kiss Mother good-bye. No; you can't come with me—I shall not be home until late. Mind everything Mrs. Iverson tells you while I'm gone. Now run back to the little girl and amuse her nicely."

"He is a dear little boy," said Winifred warmly, as he obeyed. Mrs. Bosby nodded solemnly.

"Major is a wonderful child. Mr. Palfrey—he's one of our millionaires—says he has never seen a boy with such a beautiful face and nature as Major; he hasn't a fault—Major, use your handkerchief! Those workmen make such a frightful noise I don't see how you stand it! No—don't come down to the door with me; you have enough to do. I can find my way out."

In the visitor's glance round, Winifred received the impression of the night before, she couldn't tell how, that Mrs. Bosby was disappointed because they lived on so small a scale. She seemed really rather nice, yet oddly baffling; there was a feeling that she might develop in some way that was not expected.

It was a little difficult flying round the house, putting the rooms in order, with Major interestedly following—little Matilda, of course, stumping in his

wake—undoubtedly good, but hamperingly conversational.

“Why do you make the beds, Mrs. Iverson? Why are those men working here? Why haven’t you got a little boy like me? Why are you going downstairs again? Why do you have that little mole at the corner of your mouth, Mrs. Iverson?” Questions interspersed with remarks that Winifred felt she should not hear, such as: “My papa didn’t know we were going away, I guess he was awful mad. Sometimes my mamma cries at breakfast.”

It was a relief when Mrs. Brentwood, after telephoning, stopped to take care of the children; and Winifred herself got over to the market, where you met everybody you knew at eleven o’clock, in these days when people openly bragged of their economies; those whose incomes had not been lessened by the war were almost apologetic.

Back of one’s own affairs there was ever that deepening sense of urgent need, both here and abroad. Every small social diversion was made to pay its toll, as well as the big balls and charity concerts. Lucia Bannard’s bridge party that night cost you fifty cents for the local Relief Fund; the little dance at Mrs. Silverton’s, the Monday when you carried over all your own fox-trot records, mulcted you the same amount for the non-combatants; women knitted woollen scarfs for soldiers in trains and penitentiaries and opera boxes.

“And if you have an overcoat for a poor man——” Lucia Bannard, velvet-toqued and furred, made

incidental appeal to Winifred as they stood by the pearly onions and golden grapefruit, unheeding the outstretched hand of the vendor behind the stall, patiently offering change.

“We haven’t a thing left to give away.”

“Well, somebody’s got to find one! Did you ever see anything so dear as things are?” Lucia’s tone took on a fervid quality. “It’s the most astonishing thing, I don’t know how we’ve managed it, but now, when Donald’s business has been so bad and there’s less money than we’ve ever had, we’re actually paying cash for everything. Oh, I can’t begin to tell you how those bills have hung over me each month ever since I was married! I feel like a free woman. . . . Yes, that is my change; thank you. Oh, I think I’ll take one beet. No, I don’t care if a bunch is only five cents; I just want one for garnish.”

“Your company came, didn’t she?” said Mrs. Roberts, ornately joining the group. “I saw her walking home from the station with Mr. Iverson last evening; he was talking so interestedly he didn’t see me. What did you say? She’s going to stay a couple of days longer? No—not really! Well, you’ll have to bring her to the Bannards’ bridge party to-night then. You and Leslie can’t possibly drop out now.”

“Leslie told her we had the engagement, but she said last night she didn’t know much about the game.”

“Oh, then she’ll come!” said Mrs. Silverton with decision.

Events proved her right. Mrs. Bosby did not return until dinner time, with Leslie; little Major had been glued to the upstairs window for an hour watching for her, the floor below being still in chaos. She had, it appeared, been sitting all day in a corner of Leslie's office by the stenographer's desk, waiting for a telephone message from her husband or the lawyer, neither of which came, and only going out to lunch meekly with Leslie because he insisted on it.

"She hasn't the spirit to eat," he confided to his wife. He himself looked worn, but was most aggressively bright and cheerful. "I tell you that husband of hers is a brute—just plain brute—to keep her waiting like that. She was afraid she was in the way; but I said to her: 'Della, in the little time you're here I want you to use me, or the place, in any way you can.' When I think of what her father did for me! If I have anything private to talk over with a customer I can go in the next room. I tell you, she's as plucky a little woman as you'll find. I don't believe she'll get off now before Monday." His eye fixed on Winifred's. "I admire Della more than any one I know."

"Yes, dear," said his wife heartily.

Mingled with an amused consternation was a tender pride in his unflinching courtesy—she had certainly married a gentleman! She touched his hair with her light finger tips as he went on, with a change of voice:

"I tell you I'm looking forward to a good game to-night with the Wilmers! I wouldn't urge Della

to come if I were you—she wants to go straight to bed."

Though Mrs. Bosby ate her dinner in silence, except when admonishing Major to use his handkerchief, afterward—when she sat with the boy on her lap watching Winifred clearing up, while Leslie shaved, whistling, in remote regions—she roused herself to say that she supposed she might as well make the effort to join the party.

"My brain gets very tired thinking so much alone, and I know it would please Leslie—dear fellow—to have me go. If I can wear what I have on—"

"Why, yes," said Winifred; later laying aside her evening gown for a plainer one, on Leslie's delicately asking whether it was not a little too dressed up, considering Della's lack of festive array. She knew Leslie would have donned overalls if a friend had been reduced to that garb.

The game, perhaps, failed of its expected bloom, Leslie, with Mrs. Bosby as his partner for most of the evening, being painstakingly occupied in telling her when it was her turn to bid, and what took the last trick, and whether the make at the beginning of the hand had been spades or no-trumps, while their opponents merrily forged ahead.

Afterward, however, Mrs. Bosby proving abstractedly nonconversational with strangers, he sat by her at supper, a little apart from the jolly, intimate crowd, affectionately entertaining and protective, as she evidently leaned toward him in spirit; she looked really pretty when she talked, smiling. Leslie said

almost defiantly to Winifred, when they got home, that he had never enjoyed an evening more in his life.

IV

"WELL, really, I think it's an outrage that Winifred should have to take care of that boy all the time; she couldn't even come to the matinée with us now!" Slender, green-velveted Mrs. Wilmer's hair was red and her tone had the fervid quality. "How long is that Bosby woman going to stay? Don't get out your money; I always have tickets for the Tube."

Mrs. Roberts, a large, moving mass of brown fur tails, replaced her perfunctorily offered pocketbook as she hurried along with the others.

"Thank you. Well, it seems to me there's something very strange in her staying on in this way from day to day—with a husband in Indianapolis! I should think she'd want to go home and get some clothes, anyway. Yes, I know they say she's here on business; but still—Do you think Winifred realizes"—Mrs. Roberts was one of these kindly women who never think you know anything about your own affairs unless somebody tells you of them—"how much Leslie and his friend are together?"

"Oh, goodness! Of course she realizes," responded the pretty Mrs. Silverton carelessly. "She doesn't mind, though. I think it's awfully tiresome myself. She says they've always been like brother and sister." Her tall-feathered hat forged ahead. "Come on, if you don't want to miss that train!"

Though, indeed, always heralding her expected

flight on the morrow, after two weeks Mrs. Bosby still left the house every morning with Leslie and returned at night with him, her dumpy little figure inclined toward his protective one as they talked earnestly. She spent the greater part of the day in the office, waiting for that telephone either from her husband or the lawyer; the latter sometimes called her up, but the former never did.

There seemed to be, also, an endless amount of complications in regard to title deeds, involving long journeys by trolley with Leslie to some mysteriously situated courthouse, imposing without and incredibly dingy within, which, after traversing immense hallways, always turned out to be the wrong courthouse —trips that necessitated endless studying of papers with Leslie in those evenings when they stayed home.

There was a continued confusion and uncertainty, on receiving an invitation, as to whether it included Mrs. Bosby, or whether she would still be there if it did. She was not, in the slang parlance of the day, a mixer; wherever they went she fell tacitly to Leslie's sole lot. If her bridge playing was bad, her dancing was even worse; small woman though she was and graceful ordinarily, she seemed weighted with lead; her feet clung to the floor. No man asked her as a partner a second time; but Leslie fox-trotted with her heroically and sat out the intervals, affectionately conversational, the smile she always had for him lighting her pale face.

The pile of magazines lay untouched on the table at home; the intimate, haphazard intercourse with

the Wilmers and Bannards and Silvertons was imperceptibly cut off. Sometimes Mrs. Bosby took Major to town for the day, and they seemed to make a tour of the shops; but he was usually left in Winifred's hands except when kind Mrs. Brentwood helped her out.

Winifred was sorry for the little fellow; but despite his ostensible goodness, he proved to have annoying ways. Sweet things disappeared in the most astounding quantities; as stated, indeed, by the cheerful Irish Ellen who had taken the place of the gloomy Minna, you couldn't keep a thing hid from that young limb. He as often left little Matilda howling as amused her, and he *would* scuff his feet along the new floors; even the poor child's caresses were pervaded by the fact that he hadn't used his handkerchief.

It was impossible, perhaps, not to resent somewhat that Mrs. Bosby seldom noticed little Matilda. When Della occasionally talked to Winifred, however, she had a certain charm, in contrast to her usual vague, harassed air of abstraction.

Leslie's ardour never flinched; he was as affectionate, as scrupulously kind, as ever, and even more insistent on the fact of how much they enjoyed Della's visit, narrowly watchful of any hint of dissent from Winifred. Yet there was a change in him. He was, though controlledly, tense to a degree; little things irritated him unaccountably—Major's scuffing feet and sniffle, for instance. He almost shunned his wife, seeming, in their moments alone, separated

from her as by a wall of glass, either too sleepy to talk or frustratingly monosyllabic, with the warning to her not to speak so loud. If she knew that the state of things was being commented on in the neighbourhood she felt an arrogant disregard of it in his behalf.

Husbands and wives, like children, have their streaks of being “good”; this was one of Winifred’s. She had a carelessly proud, unalterable faith in her husband’s faith, too intimately personal to be formulated: he was Leslie! Exasperating as the situation was, she felt a tender, half-humorous, half-admiring indulgence of his state of mind, even though she could not sympathize with it; she knew that Leslie’s friend *had to be sacred!*

For a moment, indeed, one afternoon, the sense of Mrs. Bosby’s presence in her husband’s office sent a lightning flash of jealousy through her, which seemed to whelm her even for that instant in a flash of choking horror, where every sense writhed in torment. She struggled out of it instantly, and reached the clear, sunlit world again with an inexpressible joy and lightness of spirit, in her freedom from the evil thing.

V

IT WAS at the end of the third week, when the two came home from the station one night somewhat earlier than usual. In the first light snow of the season Mrs. Bosby’s apparel showed thinner than ever.

It was evident to the most casual observer that something had happened; she looked as though she were crying, while Leslie bent over her solicitously, half supporting her. Mrs. Roberts and the Silvertons walked, unseen, behind.

"Well, what is it?" asked Winifred curiously of her husband as Mrs. Bosby, calling Major on her way, disappeared in her own room.

Leslie spread out his hands as though unconsciously to keep his wife away, and mechanically dropped into a chair; he looked tense and haggard.

"It's hot as the deuce in here. Open the window—she can't feel the draft here."

"Yes, she will. But what is it, dear?"

"She's had an awful time to-day—she won't get a thing from those lots; and she had a letter from her husband this afternoon. That man's a bad egg; he won't give her a cent. We were all at a consultation in the directors' room when Miss Connolly came running over for me. . . . They had Della lying out on the floor. I got her quiet after a while. . . . She can't go back to him—that's certain. I told her of course you'd want her to make her home with us as long as she needed it."

"But, Leslie——"

"Don't you *want* Della?"

"Yes, yes!" said Winifred hurriedly. She strove for ground to stand on. "But don't you think it would be better if she had some other place to wait in besides your office?" she hazarded, and stopped as he put up his hand impatiently.

"Yes, yes; of course! Don't speak so loud. I told her that last week, and she spoke at once of the Young Women's Christian Association. She doesn't want to stay in the office. Well, I'm glad, at any rate, to do what I can for poor little Della—when I think of what her father did for me. Great Scott!" The sound of Major's slippers scuffing down the stairs became apparent. "Can't that child ever lift his feet?"

"Hush! Don't speak so loud," said Winifred.

Mrs. Bosby was red-eyed; she looked paler and plumper than ever in the invariable brown skirt and lace waist, but she seemed to retain her composure with difficulty. Winifred could not help feeling really sorry for her as the meal progressed.

"I hear you had bad news to-day," she ventured sympathetically.

Mrs. Bosby's voice was tremulous.

"Yes. My brain is very tired. My husband's letter—it was most insulting! If it were not for Leslie—such a dear, true friend as he is—I don't know what I should have done. I will never go back with Major until his father consents to my terms."

Little Major nodded.

"My papa thinks a lot of me—that is why my mamma always gets what she wants," he asserted gently.

"You don't say you are still at dinner! We finished half an hour ago," said a voice in the doorway—no other than that of Mrs. Roberts, in a won-

derful lace evening cap, with crimson bows on each side like blinders, her large form wrapped in a long purple cloak.

Mrs. Roberts, after four years of neighbouring with the Leslie Iversons, was invariably surprised that they hadn't finished dinner.

"Now don't get up—anybody; please don't get up! I can't sit down; I can't stay a moment. Mr. Roberts is outside, with the Wilmers, in a taxi; we are on our way over to the Ridge. I just stopped in for a second to inquire about Mrs. Bosby. Mr. Wilmer said she had such a terrible time in the office to-day; it made quite an excitement, everybody was talking about it. I'm so glad to see you downstairs, Mrs. Bosby."

"Oh, she's much better," said Winifred cheerfully. "It was very kind of you to stop in."

"Oh, my dear—one can do so little! You're not going over to the Laurences'? I thought everybody was invited. Good-bye! Now, Mr. Iverson, don't come out with me; go on with your dinner. Don't come out—really! Well——"

They did go on with the dinner, but with an added interruption in the door of the butler's pantry, which developed a squeak necessitating the immediate application of oil by Leslie. The door still squeaked. It was found, after violently swinging it to and fro, that it would not latch—it was in some way out of plumb, though the carpenter had been there only the week before to put a new lock on it.

The whole evening resolved itself into a grim strug-

gle on the part of Leslie, his coat removed, with that door; it was taken off its hinges and laid flat, regardless of Ellen and outgoing dishes; it was whittled, and planed with a plane commandeered from a neighbour, and measured and hung, and taken down again, and the lock pried off and put on again, with more planing and much losing and finding of screws.

Beads stood on Leslie's forehead as he worked in a tense silence, save for an occasional savage, muttered reference to workmen who did not understand their business; while Mrs. Bosby, papers in hand, in the invariable brown skirt and shirtwaist, her plump face very pale, wandered in and out unnoticed, finally seating herself resignedly on the sofa in the other room and replying monosyllabically to Winifred's remarks. She was the sort of guest who never opens a book. When after a two-hours' struggle the door was rehung—still out of plumb!—Leslie only came in to say tersely, though kindly:

“You'd better go to bed, Della; you're tired.” And she obeyed, with eyes that meekly waited on his.

He did not speak to his wife, except when it was necessary, barely kissing her good-night.

This state of things could not last any longer—it simply could not; yet what was Winifred to do? As she lay on her pillow a long line of months, perhaps years, seemed to stretch out before her, weighted down with Mrs. Bosby and the care of the boy. She could not keep imposing him on her mother! How could the visitor be got rid of? She must be got

rid of! Yet how, with Leslie so obstinately, so sacrificially, a friend?

If she could only talk the situation over with him plainly—make up her mind to break through that guard he kept round the subject—tell him, no matter how he felt about his old Mrs. Bosby, it wasn't fair to *her*! She felt tired of achieving that painful asset called character. She wanted to put out her small dimpled arm and shake him, and scream to him to wake up and listen to what she had to say; but in the very midst of this growing storm of passion some power seemed to hold on to her warningly, to steady her almost in spite of herself.

To break this silence would, she knew instinctively, shatter something else—the delicate crystal of the lamp that held the flame of love, which could not be made perfect again, no matter how neatly it might be mended. If her husband sacrificed her thus it was because, after the manner of men, he felt her to be one with himself.

If Mrs. Bosby had to stay until an earthquake removed her—she had to; that was all there was about it. The quivering of Winifred's red lips gradually ceased, her dark eyes looked more steadily into the darkness—she even found herself smiling unaccountably. But the night was not to be a peaceful one. Mrs. Bosby knocked at the door an hour later to say that Major was ill.

He was, indeed, very sick and in great pain, with more and more evidences incontinently of purloined food—mince pie, nuts, chocolates, grapes, and the

like—a poor little pale-lipped, shivering culprit with a gasping courage during paroxysms, though futilely protesting that Ellen had forced these dainties on him.

The doctor was telephoned for; everybody was hurrying round in wrappers, consulting, heating water, and bringing up needed articles. Mrs. Bosby, two long braids down her back, in a shapeless brown robe open at her white throat, worked over Major. All her abstraction had vanished; she was alert, capable, maternal—nay, more; there was something in her expression that puzzled. Her eyes took on a singular light, even in the midst of anxiety, that seemed to grow more peacefully exalted. It was nearly morning when little Major, after crying out that he wanted his papa, at last slept.

“And I hope you’ll get some rest now, Mrs. Bosby,” said Winifred, as they parted.

“I hope so,” said Mrs. Bosby.

She took Leslie’s hand and pressed it to her lips, regardless of his quick, shamefaced, protesting, “Now, Della!” as she murmured:

“Such a friend as Leslie has always been! He has heart. You don’t mind my saying that, Mrs. Iverson?”

“Not in the least,” said Winifred, with emphasis.

The visitor wore the same high and serene look the next day, which, save for a trip to the telegraph office later, she spent in looking after the child. She even entertained little Matilda winningly with the invalid, who recovered rapidly. Leslie stayed down

late at the office to finish some important business; he seemed very tired and taciturn; his eyes shunned his wife's, though he had a few moments' murmured conversation with Della, the latter radiantly earnest.

When she went to town the next morning she took Major with her, leaving Winifred to fly forcefully round the house, like a small embodied Wild West wind, hurling things into place, cleaning the guests' room, and putting up the winter curtains there—Ellen scurrying before her with mops and pails and stepladder.

Mrs. Brentwood came over for her granddaughter—who was being hustled into outdoor apparel—with eyes that kindly questioned, though she said nothing when Winifred announced that the visitors would perhaps be with them a week or two more. And over the telephone and in person Mrs. Iverson unflinchingly accepted invitations, or engaged tickets for the three of them for Mrs. Wilmer's dance the next night, and the Relief Fund bridge party on Friday, and the Zanzibar Exhibition for the unemployed, and the Crandalls' New England supper, the next week, for the War Sufferers.

You had to go to the Crandalls' New England suppers because you liked Nell and Will so much, even though you went as a sufferer yourself, their beans and doughnuts being always of an abnormal pallor. Winifred also paid two calls in the afternoon, in white gloves and her best clothes, insensibly hedging one round from too informal approach, and casually mentioned Mrs. Bosby's prolonged visit. She

was still keyed up when she got home, though a little fatigued, and it being Ellen's day out, with the dinner to get.

Putting on an old pink frock, after Matilda was bathed and put to bed, damp and rosy, with little clinging arms—one's own child was a joy!—she completed her preparations and still had time to spare—and more yet! It was late for little Major to be abroad. It grew later and later; yet they did not come.

It was very strange! Had anything happened? A wild thrill of anxiety went through her. You always thought things could not happen; but they did! Why had not Leslie telephoned? Oh, there was the telephone ringing now! She ran toward it joyfully.

“Oh, is that you, dear?”

“Hello!” said a deep voice at the other end. “Hello! Is this Mrs. Iverson? This is Mr. Roberts, Mrs. Iverson. Is Leslie home yet? Well, will you ask him to call me up as soon as he gets in? Thank you. I want to ask him about the Municipal Rally.

. . . Why, you don't need to be anxious at all, Mrs. Iverson. Mrs. Roberts met him going to dinner at the Venetia with Mrs. Bosby this evening. Mrs. Roberts says she supposed, of course, you knew.

. . . Well, perhaps they've gone to a show since—in that case. . . . Yes. Good-night!”

Gone to dinner with Mrs. Bosby without taking the trouble to let her know! This was too much—to spend his evenings off with her! To all feminine

suburbanites the little dinner in town, with lights and music, and food with which one has had no previous connection, strikes the most intimate note of festivity. They had not thought they could afford the Venetia lately!

Winifred sat enveloped in a strange confusion; the dinner dried up in the oven unnoticed. . . . Another hour rolled by. If they had gone to a show—— She was thinking so hard that the sound of her husband's key in the lock made her jump; but she sat still, only saying:

“Has Mrs. Bosby taken a cab from the station?”

“No,” he answered, throwing open a window in the hall before coming in.

The night was muggy and warm; that might account for his jaded appearance. He mopped a damp brow under his fair hair as he seated himself across the room, his legs stretched out to an abnormal length; tired as he was, there was a strange, unwonted glint in his eye as he looked at her.

“Della's gone home.”

“Gone!”

He nodded.

“Yes; with the boy. I just got them off on the last train. You're to parcel-post her bag after her. She left good-bye for you. Her husband 'phoned her this morning, as soon as he heard that Major was ill—he's crazy over the child!—he'll give her anything she wants. Gee, I'm tired!” His voice grew insensibly louder and louder. “I was running round all the afternoon trying to straighten out things for

her; I never got back to the office at all. I went nearly crazy! We had to stop for her coat the last thing—it had to be altered. She'd picked it out before, but she tried on a lot of others afterward to be sure she liked the first one best."

"Her coat?"

"Yes—the sealskin; her husband said she could have it—that was what she was standing out for, you know. It cost him a thousand, but she says he can afford it." Leslie shifted his gaze, but still kept on: "She can't keep warm in anything but fur out there; the winters are so cold. You know how sensitive her throat is."

"Oo-ooh!" said Winifred, in a tone of profound enlightenment.

So that had been Mr. Bosby's barbarity to his wife—refusing her a thousand-dollar coat. But Mrs. Bosby was actually gone! There was a growing intoxicating essence of freedom in the thought. Winifred raised her voice:

"Leslie, why on earth didn't you telephone me?"

"I did. Ellen said you were out and I left the message with her; she said she'd write it down."

"She went before I came in. I never thought to look on the shelf."

"Oh!" He rose after a pause, shut the window, and came lazily over to her, that glint in his eye even more apparent. "I like that pink frock you have on—don't ever wear brown! Do you know I haven't kissed you since I got home?"

"Yes; and you're not going to now," returned Winifred with spirit, drawing out of reach.

"I'm not?"

"No. Keep away! I tell you I won't be kissed. I——"

She fended off his arm and, slipping by, dashed up the stairs, with him after her, racing through one room after another, with small shrieks and loud banging of doors until he caught her finally, breathless.

"You're scandalous! You're not behaving like a wife at all," he admonished her fondly.

"I don't feel like one."

"You don't! You—don't! Well, what do you think of that?"

His lips were pressed to her lips, her soft cheek, her soft hair, again and again and again, with a new fervour in them. His voice took on a fuller note as he pushed her head back at last, so that he could look into her lovely eyes.

"You—don't—know—what a darling—what a darling you are! You don't half know it. But I do, dear; I do, my sweetest!"

"Oh," said Winifred dreamily, leaning closer to him. "Doesn't it seem too heavenly to have the house to ourselves!"

"I should think so," he breathed. "Oh, I should think so!" He straightened involuntarily as he added, like one who has caught himself up unflinchingly: "Though, of course, we'll miss Della and the boy. She thinks you're fine! I said to her: 'Della,

I never enjoyed anything more than your visit: I hope you'll come again soon and stay twice as long.' When I think of what her father—— What's the joke, you crazy girl? Look out—— You'll scare Matilda!"

THE WONDER-WORKER

HELLO! hello!—Is this Mrs. Wilmer?—Yes, it's Winifred.—Oh, Clementine! I've been wanting to ask you and Jack for Thursday. I'm giving a little dance for Katharine Coates; she's visiting me.—Oh, you must remember her; she was one of my bridesmaids.—Yes, the tall, classical one with the wonderful hair.—Oh, I'm going to wear my wedding dress.—Yes, as festal as that!—Well, it's my first party since I was married. I'm so excited about it I don't know what to do.—Leslie is making the grandest preparations, and everyone has shown so much interest. Mrs. Paxton is going to lend us her palms and the boys are to get us big dogwood branches.—Thank you so much, but I think we shall have enough without the rubber plant.—Thank you, I do hope it will be a success. We are going to have plenty of men, anyway. I'll see you Thursday, then.—Good-bye.”

“Well, that's settled!” Young Mrs. Iverson turned from the telephone to her husband, a tall, fair, pleasant-faced young man who sat in an arm-chair, looking over the pages of a magazine as he smoked his pipe. She dropped down in a seat beside him, her dark eyes alight. “It's really wonderful—not one refusal! Put down your book, dear;

as long as Katharine has gone up to write a letter we might as well consult about the last things now. I hate to ask you to bring out anything more; you've been so awfully good about it—the lanterns you bought are perfectly fine; but I find I won't have a minute, so——”

“All right,” said her husband, with alacrity, flinging down the magazine and taking a pencil and envelope from his pocket. “Go ahead.”

“Well, then, we ought to have a chimney for the big rose-coloured lamp—I can't get it here, and it looks much nicer with that lighted.”

“Yes, it does. I'll take the top in to be fitted, if you'll wrap it up in paper for me.”

“And if you could get a dozen more lemonade glasses—any kind will do.”

Mr. Iverson's brow puckered thoughtfully. “Don't you think it would be better to have them matched? If we need a set, why don't we get them?”

“All right, if you are willing to spend the money. I'll show you what we have. Then, will you telephone to Guidelli's for three pounds of their little fancy cakes? Or three and a half——”

“Better say four.” He laid down the pencil and looked at her with a considering expression. “I was going to ask you—— How would you like some game pâtés? They make 'em to order in a little French place where I go to dinner sometimes—man makes a specialty of 'em. He took me down in the kitchen one day and introduced me to his wife; nice

little woman as you want to meet. You could see your face in the coppers and things."

"Well——" Winifred considered in her turn, with a swift yet tender gleam of amusement as she looked at him. Leslie made friends everywhere; the small, stubby members of the new Boys' Club over at the Ridge already hailed him almost as intimately as the whilom college chums, who were always enthusiastically looking him up and luring him off on their affairs. Winifred had sometimes suffered a pang of jealousy at his devotion to his Alma Mater. "We don't *need* the pâtés. Still, they would be something different."

"Oh, we might as well have a good spread while we're about it," announced Mr. Iverson. "Anything more to suggest?"

"No, that's all, I think. Oh, I hope the party will be a success!"

"No fear of that. But hadn't you better see now what Miss Coates is doing? I want to finish this story."

"Leslie, how many times have I told you that she expects you to call her Katharine? Don't you like her?"

"Why, I like her well enough; but she seems sort of far away all the time." His voice sank. "She isn't in love, is she?"

Winifred looked at him. "She hasn't told me anything yet. Hush, here she is now. Come over here on the sofa by me, Katharine. Leslie, you may go upstairs and finish your story, if you want to.

Everything's settled, dear. The Wilmers are coming, and Leslie is going to see about the last things for me."

"Really, he is wonderful," said Miss Coates, in a lovely contralto voice. She was a singularly beautiful girl, with a sort of untouchable crystalline freshness in her yellow hair and yellow attire, as of spun glass. She had the air of a royal princess, with, however, a shade of pensiveness in her eyes, as if she wasn't getting all she should. "I never saw a man who was willing to take so much trouble—and he does everything so well!"

Winifred nodded, with the expression of pride on her small, glowing face. "That's what everyone says. I don't know what I should have done if I had had a husband like Audrey's." Audrey was her younger sister. "Grattan is awfully nice, of course, but she never can trust to his doing anything; he always forgets. Leslie—everybody says it won't last, but—" Her voice trailed off into silence.

It was her secret that she was really giving the party, not for Katharine, but for her husband. It was a terrible amount of trouble, with a little child in the house, and an incompetent maid, even with the proffered aid of her mother and sister, and she really didn't care much about dancing anyway; but he was so thoroughly and hospitably interested when she suggested it that she felt quite tender over his enjoyment; he had a social talent denied to her earnestness.

Winifred Iverson had been submerged, by marriage, in her domestic and civic duties; she not only kept house with unwearying devotion to detail and took care of little Matilda with incessant harrowed painstaking, but she was also deep in the Consumers' League, by telephone, with women twice her age. Leslie was always kind and affectionate; he fetched and carried; he adored his baby girl; and he went into another room evenings, with his book, when his wife telephoned interminably. The Brentwoods, Winifred's family, when they didn't like anything, "just banged away," as Audrey expressed it; it had taken Winifred some time to realize that Leslie never "banged." If she didn't want to do as he quietly suggested, he "let it go at that"; but there were slight gradations which after a while she began to perceive. When the dancing craze came up he got in the habit of dropping in at one or other of the neighbour's for an hour, when she was too busy to go with him; he entertained his college friends in town. People began telling her the next day how much they enjoyed seeing him, as if she had missed something. All of a sudden she began to get tired of living so strenuously for duty; she wanted to enjoy his things too. She began going out with him once more, to his unfeigned enjoyment and her own. This party was her crowning effort. It touched her that he was so interested.

Now she went on impulsively: "Leslie is so artistic! Most people here don't take the trouble to decorate their rooms, they just move out the furniture; but

we wanted this to be different. We will have enough men at any rate!"

"Well you're very fortunate," said Miss Coates. "Where I've been staying, at Netherdale, there really weren't any men at all."

"Elsie Rickland told me the other day of a dance she went to where there were twice as many girls as men. But I think too many men are almost worse than too few. When Mrs. Frobisher gave that ball last winter she had so many extra fellows that they all simply went off to the library and smoked and talked about boats and things—with the pretty girls sitting out in the ballroom! Clementine Wilmer says men always seem so crazy for each other's society."

Miss Coates laughed. "They do seem to be. Tell me who is coming."

"Let me see—I have the list here. The Crandalls—you have to ask them, they're so nice, though they are terrible dancers; and the Bannards, they're darlings; and Audrey and Grattan, of course; and the Chandors and the Paxtons and the Wilmers—those men are all so funny together!—and Ethel Roberts; I don't care for her, she's so tactful; he's older, but he's fine. Then of the new people there are the Carpenters—he's very interesting and dances well—and the Silvertons—all the men are crazy over her; *he* sings deliciously. I'm sorry there are so many married people, Katharine."

"Oh, that makes no difference," interpolated Miss Coates hastily. She took her hostess's hand in hers with a caressing gesture.

"But I'm coming to the others. There are the Rickland girls and their brother, and Mr. Roofer and Mr. Sains—friends of Leslie's—the loveliest young fellows; I just felt when they accepted that the success of the evening was assured. They have promised to bring their costumes and do a stunt for us after supper—they're really quite wonderful!—and Mr. Silverton has half promised to sing, and Mr. Paxton and Mr. Chandor are to give us a Russian dance; it's excruciatingly funny! But this is all a great secret—we wanted something different for a surprise. Then, of course"—Winifred paused slightly—"there's Rex Courtney."

"Do I remember him—a tall man with a dark moustache?"

"Yes. He went away for a while, but he's back again. He used to be mostly with the married set; but now—he looks a little older; of course he is older, but he's terribly nice. I know you'll like him, Katharine."

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Miss Coates absently. There was a pause.

"Katharine!" said Winifred, in a new tone. The hand that held hers closed over it tightly as the girl turned her head away. "There's something troubling you; I've seen it ever since you came yesterday. Oh, I know you want to enjoy everything, but you don't really. Darling, I can't bear to see you so unhappy. Is it—is it about any one you—care for? Don't tell me if you don't want to.—Why, Katharine! You're not crying?"

“Well?” said Mr. Iverson inquiringly, some three hours later, as his wife came upstairs into the room where he was already in pajamas and dressing gown. “I could hardly believe my eyes when I looked in and saw her. What’s doing?”

“Hush! Speak lower; you’ll wake little Matilda. Yes, she’s in love. I promised not to tell anybody—if you don’t stop whistling I won’t say another word.”

“All right; go ahead.”

“She met him at the games last year when she was staying with the Martins—he was a friend of their friends from California. They were together all the time for three days. I think they got pretty far along myself. She says most men are afraid of her, but he wasn’t at all. He has black hair, and a twist to one eyebrow, and his name is ‘Lige’ Robinson. Do you know him?”

“No.”

“Well, he was to come and call on the family when she got home, and he got in wrong from the start. She says he showed too much that he really wanted to talk to her. The upshot of it was that they were all perfectly down on him; they criticized his appearance and they talked so—the way families do—that Katharine thought perhaps she didn’t really know him. She cried and cried, and she didn’t meet him in town as she promised to, or answer his letters, or anything; and then he went away—she doesn’t know where—and she’s never heard of him since. But she knows now that she made a mistake—she’s been feeling it more and more—knows that she made

a dreadful mistake, and that he really was all she thought him, and that she never can care for anybody else as long as she lives, and it's just killing her."

"Poor girl, I'm sorry for her," said Mr. Iverson, rumpling his thick, light hair. "I'll go downstairs and lock up."

"But I can't help thinking, Leslie, if Rex Courtney—— Oh, wouldn't it be fine if something like that came of our party?"

II

THE day before the dance was filled with the glad bustle of coming festivity. Mrs. Paxton's palms arrived, and the glass punch bowl from Nell Crandall's which, having been originally intended for church entertainments, was happily large enough for any occasion; Mrs. Brentwood brought over the tall vases and the green umbrella stand in the car, and the best lace table-cover. At a luncheon party given at the Wilmers' for Katherine, the event of the morrow was frequently referred to—it was nicely realized that it was an event. The newest gowns were in order, Mrs. Wilmer waiting anxiously for hers to come from the dressmaker. Mrs. Roberts had had her hair washed that very morning, and Mrs. Carpenter was to have her neck massaged.

Winifred could hardly wait for Leslie's arrival home to tell him about everything; but when she ran down excitedly to greet him she stopped short as she saw his face.

"What's the matter?" she asked fearfully.

“Nothing; don’t be scared. It’s only that I find I can’t be here for to-morrow night.”

“What!”

“Now, wait. I got word to-day that the boys—you know I expected them down from Amherst a month ago and it was put off—are to give their show over at the Ridge for the Playground to-morrow night.” The Ridge was some six or seven miles away.

“Well, of course! The notices have been up all the week.”

He gave a gesture of despair. “I never saw them! I promised Hardwicke before he went to Europe that I’d shoulder the thing; he and I were the ones who got the boys to promise they’d do it. Of course Laurence—I communicated with him at once—has the club house in charge and the posters and all that, but it doesn’t let me out.”

“Can’t you get somebody to take your place?”

“I might have if I’d known before; but it’s too late now. Hardwicke and I made it a personal favour to us. Nothing but a calamity could release me now. I’ll try to be back before midnight if I can, but don’t count on it. You’ll just have to get along the best you can without me, that’s all. I’m just as disappointed as you are, Win.”

“Oh, if it’s anything to do with your old Amherst—of course everything else has to go by the board, even I; that’s sacred!”

“Don’t say anything you’ll be sorry for,” he warned her, in the even voice which she always heeded perforce,

"Very well, then, I won't; but I'll think it just the same! No, I won't, I won't!" She flung her arms around him. "Oh, I didn't mean to be hateful, but——"

"Never mind; Roofer and Sains will be here to help out, anyway."

III

IT WAS not until the morning that Winifred fully realized the awful vacuum caused by Leslie's absence. The day began in a confusing last whirl of cleaning and sweeping and "wiping down." Little fair-curled Matilda had to be got ready for a twenty-four-hours' stay at her proud grandmother's; every order from market or bakery came minus its most important article; Patrick appeared too soon to move the furniture; and the telephone rang incessantly, as ever at such times. Mrs. Bantry, who hadn't been invited, came to call.

More serious matters intervened. Mrs. Chandor called up to say that Mr. Chandor was obliged to go on a business trip, and could she bring Miss Prall, just arrived for the night, in his place? And Audrey telephoned that, as the infant, "Bruiser," was ailing she wouldn't be able to leave him. After luncheon horrified word went the rounds that Mr. Paxton had been knocked down in town and brought home broken in several places—or at least, by later advices, suffering from a sprained ankle and shock. Later, Mrs. Paxton herself telephoned to say how sorry Beverly was that he couldn't be at the dance,

but he wanted her to go anyway, as he would be asleep all the evening.

“He and Mr. Chandor are such lovely dancers,” mourned Winifred to Katharine; “and now we can’t have the Russian ballet, either! I hope nobody else will fall out.”

But at four o’clock the telephone rang again, with Leslie’s voice at the other end: “Is that you, Winifred?”

“Oh, Leslie, I’m so glad to hear you speak! It’s been a dreadful day; so many men falling out!” She gave him a brief recital. “Are you coming home, dear, after all?”

“No, I’m not coming home. By the way, I forgot to tell you that I left an order for some flowers for you and Katharine; I hope you get them all right!”

“Oh, that’s dear of you!”

“But—— The fact is, Win, I’ve been trying to call you up ever since I got in town, but I haven’t had a moment. You all right, dear?”

“Yes, dear; what is it you have to say?”

“Why, I haven’t very good news. Sains’s father died suddenly; he lived up in the State somewhere. Sains is awfully cut up; Roofer’s gone on with him. Roofer said how much they’d counted on being at your party; but of course it can’t be helped.”

“Oh, of course,” said Winifred. Her voice rose to a wail. “But what am I to do, Leslie? If I’d only known before—— I wish I’d never tried to give the old party—with all those new people coming, too!”

"Cheer up! It will be over this time to-morrow," said her husband. "Perhaps——"

"What—what?"

"Nothing. Take care of yourself, and don't try to do too much. Good-bye!"

She could tell by the unconscious tone in his voice that, sorry as he might be for her, the dance, as far as he was concerned, had already sunk out of sight; he was going to have a good time in the adored company of men. She knew just how everyone would look when she said he wouldn't be home—as if he would always take any excuse to get away.

She hastened with the dire news to Katharine. "Isn't it terrible? We're simply hoodooed; that's all there is about it. I'll never try to have anything again."

"You worry too much. It's going to be all right," said the friend consolingly. Her cheeks flushed slightly; her eyes bent hazily at Winifred. "Do you know—I had a strange dream last night. I dreamed that I was boiling soup in a tree, and a canary was singing to a bear; and there was a rainbow, and an excursion train full of people coming straight at me, and just as it got near, the locomotive turned into a ball and fell in my lap, and on it was *his* name! And I knew then that he was coming to me. I can't tell you how it made me feel; it was almost like 'The Brushwood Boy.' I know it doesn't sound like anything, Winifred, but——"

"No, it doesn't," said Winifred, laughing. She

pulled the girl down to her and kissed her. "Oh, Katharine, in spite of your dignity and your looks, you are really a little goose."

At any rate, Rex Courtney hadn't backed out! Even after all the terrible disappointments something nice might still happen for Katharine.

IV

THE party began inauspiciously after a last 'phone message that Mr. Carpenter had come home with laryngitis, and deeply regretted that he couldn't be present. Nell Crandall appeared, as usual half an hour too soon, before one had finished dressing—though you really didn't mind Nell—and without her husband, whom she had left with a raging tooth; the details of its pangs usurped the moment. It was just as well she had come out, for opening his mouth to tell her whether he was better or not simply made him furious.

It was agreed that "men never could stand pain." The narrative was all gone over again when pretty, slender Mrs. Chandor and her friend arrived, the latter a straw-coloured, silent person who was said to be very nice when you knew her. They sat in the brilliantly lighted, cleared-out little drawing room opening into the equally brilliant and cleared-out dining room with the newly waxed floors, the big jars of dogwood everywhere for decoration, while the Japanese lanterns on the inclosed piazza glimmered invitingly beyond—Winifred in her wedding gown and Katharine in shimmering green, the other women

in festal raiment, equally experiencing the retrospective throes of toothache, each one contributing her past experiences in that line.

The orgy was concluded only by the addition of plump and fair Mrs. Paxton, and then the interest merely swerved over to Mr. Paxton's condition and the horror of automobile accidents in general, until broken in its turn by a batch of arrivals—unbelievably enough, all women—red-haired Clementine Wilmer in her gorgeous new dancing gown; Mrs. Roberts, elegant in cerise satin and perpendicular hair-ornament; the chiffon-draped, drooping Mrs. Carpenter, the massaged neck well in evidence; Audrey, scarlet-cheeked and glowing. Amid much laughter and surprise at the manless condition of affairs the information was spread that Mr. Wilmer had telephoned that he didn't know when he could get home; it had been a dreadful day in "the Street"—stocks, as Mrs. Wilmer explained, having done "something or other"; but she was simply spoiling for a dance. Mr. Roberts had had the unexpected excitement of a visit from an old friend from Honolulu, to leave on the morrow—Mr. Roberts's wife had been sure that Winifred would accept his excuses; they had so much to talk about. Audrey effusively proclaimed that Grattan had insisted in staying himself with the ailing Bruiser so that she could have a change, and "Wasn't it too perfectly sweet of him? But where is Leslie?"

"Why, he isn't going to be here——"

There was a slight pause before the wondering

chorus broke forth: "Not going to be here?" "I thought you said he was so interested!"

Winifred's face flushed in spite of her. "He's dreadfully sorry. It's the night of the Amherst show at the Ridge for the Playground, and he feels responsible for the boys. It was an old engagement, but he had mistaken the date."

"But surely he can leave early," said Mrs. Carpenter eagerly.

"I'm hoping for it, but he said he couldn't count on it at all; he'll have to see the thing through. Of course there'll be a supper or something of that kind for them over there."

"Oh, my dear, if he once gets off with that set you won't see him until morning," said Mrs. Roberts as one who knew. "But isn't it exactly like men? You depend on them, and they'll throw you over for even a business engagement every time. No woman would do that."

"Yes, she would," said Audrey hotly.

"I really ought to have stayed with my husband this evening," murmured Mrs. Carpenter bitterly, as the Misses Rickland entered the room, all pearl and feathers and laciness, with the prettiest of dancing slippers.

"And your brother?" asked Winifred, smiling, gazing around for him as she greeted them.

They both looked at her in surprise. "Why—we didn't know Spofford was asked," said the youngest Miss Rickland. "He didn't say anything about it when we told him we were coming."

"He accepted," said Winifred, flushing again.

"He didn't say anything about it," corroborated the other sister. "He gets so many invitations! We think he went over to the college entertainment at the Ridge to-night, though we didn't ask him."

"Oh!" said Winifred, feeling that she could stick a dagger into Spofford Rickland's heart. Never would she invite him again! She looked wildly at that shimmering, butterfly row of women expectantly awaiting partners for the dance. Why weren't there any men? Why should her party be hoodooed in this way?

Oh, joy! Rex Courtney was in the door-way! There was a chance for romance yet, anyway. For one instant, as his dark eyes rested on the glittering phalanx of women, it seemed as if he were about to turn and flee; but he advanced hastily instead, a mechanical smile curving the lips under the brown moustache as Winifred ran toward him.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come! Please don't be scared at the outlook."

"Not I," said Mr. Courtney, yet, as she noticed, with something strangely forced in his manner.

"All our men seem to have been killed off! It's really absurd; but I'm hoping for Leslie soon. I want to take you at once to meet Miss Coates, the lovely girl over there in green; I think you know everybody else. Katharine, this is Mr. Courtney."

It was almost a shock, on turning away, to find Donald Bannard entering with his wife. His tall and lightsome presence seemed something to cling to,

as Winifred moaned out her troubles to them both hastily. "Everybody in the place will be making fun of this to-morrow. You'll have to help me out, Donald."

"Sure I will," said Mr. Bannard manfully. "Dance with everybody in the room. Why don't you set the phonograph going? Take off some of the frost. Hello, here's Mrs. Silverton!"

A slight titter went around as it was seen that she also was alone. "How perfectly dear you look!" she announced in a rich, magnetic voice, holding both of Winifred's hands; "and how nice just to have a hen party! I've been hearing about it upstairs. Arthur had a 'phone from Will Laurence before I left home, saying that he and Mr. Iverson and a lot more were going into town with the boys after the show, and have a supper there before putting them on the midnight train. There are about thirty of them. What good times men do have, don't they?"

The dagger Winifred had wished to stick into Spofford Rickland's heart seemed to have been thrust through her own. Her last hope had failed her. "Where is Mr. Silverton?" she managed to ask.

Mrs. Silverton gave way to a low-pitched laugh that was sweetly contagious. "We had the most dreadful quarrel while he was getting dressed. I'm a feminist, as you all know, and I said that if there was a war here I thought I ought to have the privilege of fighting, the same as he; and he said the idea was monstrous; and I said that I would look awfully nice in a man's uniform, and he declared nobody would

have any respect for me if I wore one; and then—oh, we both got furious! He said he wouldn't go out with any woman who talked such fool talk; and I said then he could stay home—and after I'd been so lovely to him, too, getting out his things and even running his bath water for him! I hope you're glad to have me?"

"Very," said Winifred, laughing.

"And I'm going to live up to my principles," went on Mrs. Silverton, "and take the initiative—I won't have a chance with all these lovely girls if I don't—and ask you, Mr. Bannard, if you won't please be devoted to me for the rest of the evening, I'm so lonely without Arthur. Now don't turn me down!"

"Indeed I will not!" said Mr. Bannard with alacrity.

Her gayety cast a fictitious ripple over the surface for the moment. The phonograph started, Donald leading off with Mrs. Silverton, and Rex Courtney, with a strangely funereal expression, following with Katharine. Several women essayed to dance together, but nobody seemed to be able to "lead" and after a short time the effort died down. Mrs. Silverton and Donald Bannard disappeared into the seclusion of the piazza, and Mr. Courtney subsided into a place by Nell Crandall, of all people, when there were the Rickland girls and Katharine sitting out while the phonograph played on unheeded. The women, in a satin-and-chiffon row, roving eyed, tried to talk interestedly, with lapses in between. There was a general effect of still waiting for the party to begin.

Winifred wandered desperately out into the hall and in again—in the interval of laboriously talking—in hope each time that the situation might have changed for the better; she felt more and more powerless to “swing” it as Leslie would have done. She caught pitying glances bent on her; she knew everyone was secretly talking about her and Leslie.

“I’m so sorry it’s turned out like this for you, Katharine,” she whispered miserably, as the latter slipped down beside her. “What’s got into Rex Courtney I don’t know!”

“The poor man has been up the last two nights till four o’clock in the morning,” said Katharine compassionately. “I heard him telling Mrs. Crandall he fell asleep on the train coming out and slept ’way on to Hightown; and he missed his dinner and had just time to catch his train home and dress and come over here; and he strained his back jumping off the car; he can hardly move. But you needn’t be sorry for me, my dear.” Her eyes shone meaningfully.

“Katharine! You’re not still thinking of that——”

“Yes. I can’t get over my beautiful, beautiful dream! I know that something lovely is going to happen.”

“Well, you are a dear,” said Winifred blankly, with, however, the reservation that Katharine was a little mad.

“Mr. Bannard is still on the piazza with Mrs. Silverton,” suggested Mrs. Carpenter, her brown eyes roving longingly. “Perhaps he doesn’t know how to get away from her.”

Mrs. Wilmer shook her head. "No married man stays talking to a woman unless he wants to," she asserted. "As long as they're having a good time they might as well keep out there. Lucia's glad he's entertained; he's usually so restless."

But just then the two returned to the fold. There was suddenly that dead silence in the room which sometimes obtains. Winifred looked around once more with a sinking heart. Would the agony never be over? It was still nearly an hour to the time for which supper had been ordered. Why had they bought those pâtés? There was far too many! And how were they ever, ever going to hold out till then? She dashed up to her room for a brief moment, and sobbed foolishly. She felt, somehow, not at all married, but like a child, alone.

Hark! As she came downstairs again—hark! What was that? They all raised their heads to listen. Hark! Nearer it came, that rollicking volume of sound from many voices:

Oh, Amherst, brave Amherst,
'Twas a name known to fame in days of yore.
May it ever be glorious
Till the sun shall climb the heavens no more!

The last words came in deafening chorus amid the whirr of stopping motor wheels. There was a flare of lights, and the next instant the door was flung open and Leslie, with an eager-eyed crowd, plunged in.

"Hello, Win!" His face was radiant; never had

he looked so angelic or more like a royal prince. "I've brought a small section of the gang back with me for a good dance. Boys, I want you to meet my wife. Mr. Herring, Mr. Bowers, Mr. Platt, Mr. Churchill, Mr. Conolly——" The list went on and on as a dozen fresh-faced youths and several older men stepped up to shake hands with her. "Pass them along, Donald."

"Oh, Leslie, I thought you had gone into town! I thought——"

"Hush! You might have known I wouldn't. But where's Robinson gone?"

"Robinson?"

He nodded, with an odd, triumphant twinkle in his eyes, to the startled question in hers in the midst of the press around them. "Yes, 'Lige' Robinson. I found him wandering alone in the hall afterward, looking for Steele, who didn't show up. He's interested in playgrounds, so I got him to come back with us. I'm some little wonder-worker, I'd have you know. Well, will you look at that!"

Over in the far doorway with Katharine—a goddess, indeed!—stood a slight man with an upward twist to one eyebrow and—

"Why, Leslie, he's lame!" whispered Winifred.

His eyes met hers again in mute yet meaning assent as his hand pressed her shoulder. "Yes, that was why, you see, he didn't—— But she'll make it all right for him now. He's an awfully nice chap, Win. Somebody turn that phonograph loose."

There was a rush on to the floor amid a wild hilari-

ousness of voices and laughter. The blonde Miss Rickland whirled past.

"But won't they have to go for the train soon?" asked Winifred a little later.

"Train nothing! They can't connect from here with anything in town now. They'll have to wait over with us for the six-thirty and take the eight o'clock from the Terminal."

"But, Leslie! We haven't enough beds; we haven't——"

"Who said anything about beds? We'll just whoop it up till morning. If any one wants to go home, he can. Come, let's have a turn."

The party at the Iversons' was one of those events, to be talked of long afterward, that seems to make an epoch different from anything before or since. Men and women were to fraternize years hence with the delighted words: "Oh, were you at that dance? Did you ever have such a funny time in your life? Do you remember——"

There was that revelation to the staid householder that it is actually possible to be festively out of bed during those hours when you are supposed to be sound asleep in one, only Mrs. Paxton and Mr. Courtney leaving early. It was not only that they danced and danced and danced yet more hilariously after a supper interspersed with rousing choruses and reckless answers to telephone calls from stupefied husbands at home; it was not only the magic circle formed later, with wild applause at the performances

of "stunts" within it—there was also that absurd and stealthy sallying forth in groups before the gray dawn, cloaked and hooded women escorted, with suppressed and immoderate laughter, to their own nearby households, to forage for more bread and eggs and bacon and orange marmalade for the breakfast at the Iversons', to be cooked and eaten there by the whole party, and the triumphant march of the men to the train afterward, with the women waving in massed farewell and just about ready to drop.

Katharine and her lover alone had sat all the time together, radiantly oblivious. Leslie had done the trick after all!

BOGGYBRAE

LESLIE, there's something I forgot to ask you last night."

Winifred Iverson, in a crisp, rose-striped morning frock that set off her pretty dark hair and eyes, leaned earnestly over the Japanese breakfast tray toward her husband. He was a tall, fair, pleasant-faced young man, who, after the traditional habit of the commuter, was eating his bacon and eggs with one eye roving competently sideways over the newspaper on the table near him. Between bites he made absent-minded replies to the little flaxen-curled Matilda, sitting beside him in her high chair, well bibbed against the overflowing of her tipping spoon, held tight in her small fist.

"Keep still for a moment, Matilda. Leslie, isn't it 'most time for a directors' meeting?"

"Yes, there's one to-morrow—Wednesday."

"Oh, I'm so glad! You're going to it, aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

Mrs. Iverson gave a sigh of relief; her knitted brow smoothed. For attending the meetings of the board a ten-dollar gold-piece was the perquisite of each member; Leslie always gave his coin to her.

"That just helps me out. I want to buy the new rug this week without fail; this old one is so *dreadful* I

can't ask another soul into the house until I do. I've been saving up my Christmas and birthday money for nearly a year, and if I don't get the rug now the money will just melt, in these hard times. Mother and I saw the kind I want yesterday—awfully good value, but I just needed ten dollars more. She wanted to give it to me, but I wouldn't let her, with all she's done already."

"That was right."

Mr. Iverson rose; kissed his wife and child; swooped for overcoat, hat, and newspaper; made for the door, and then turned back with his usual sunny expression, to say: "I'll be home a little late for dinner. Your father has asked me up to the links with him this afternoon; there's nothing doing at the office, so I might as well get off——" and was gone.

His wife sat looking after him with a slight knitting of the brow. When a man played golf it seemed to take an unholy grip on him; it literally took precedence of everything else. If Leslie could get off early, there were ever so many odd jobs to be done in the house; there was no sense in hiring a man at so much an hour when one was trying to keep down expenses. She couldn't realize that to do little odd jobs at the present moment irritated him inexplicably—in some foolish way it irritated him that he did have this expensive time to waste on them; there was nothing to sugar the thought, as there was in the joys of golf.

Her own father, kind Mr. Brentwood, abetted Leslie in the latter, saying that he needed both the

exercise and the diversion in this crucial period of affairs; perhaps he was right—Leslie had looked unusually anxious lately, in contrast to his habitual sunniness. But women did things very differently. She herself had been conscientiously economical on a reduced allowance during this war strain which had so greatly affected the trade of the Electrographic Company. She had at times a feeling that she could have run her husband's business better than he did; he *would* keep that expensive secretary, when she had told him a dozen times that he could get a woman to fill the place for half the price; it seemed odd, too, that he should take afternoons off for pleasure when business was slack.

Winifred hustled around putting things to rights; this was her busy morning—there was a meeting at Mrs. Bannard's at ten o'clock to sew for the Red Cross; but her mother had promised to do the marketing for her. In view of the uncertain times, the High Cost of Living was being enthusiastically grappled with; the era of telephoning for supplies had come to an end,—in theory at least—the nicest people coming in their motors or on foot with baskets or string bags, and filling them at the newly established market, where those nice farmers were so pleased to sell to you. The Price of Food had become a Cult, to be discussed on all occasions.

Even the little Matilda had a market-basket about the size of a peanut, with which she trotted along by the side of her proud grandmother, when the latter stopped for her, as to-day. Mrs. Brent-

wood was fresh-coloured, with slightly gray hair, and an expression of calm that contrasted with the anxious tenseness of the daughter.

"I see that your screen doors are not off yet, Winifred," she remarked.

"No, I've been waiting for Leslie to take them down; of course the season has been late. I thought he'd do it to-day, but he won't be home in time; he's going with Father to play golf. He does caddie for himself now, but still——"

"Oh," said the mother understandingly, "it's such beautiful weather!" She hesitated a moment: "How about the rug? I want to say again——"

"No, you won't," interrupted the daughter, smiling, with her arms around the other. "I'm to have the ten-dollar gold piece when Leslie goes to his directors' meeting to-morrow. I'll have the rug this week, so it's all right."

"All yight," echoed the little Matilda, as, her tiny hand burrowing into the fond grandmother's, the two went off; the child in her white woolly coat and rosetted cap looking like a little white rabbit skipping along.

At the very moment of her confident assertion, Winifred had had that strange, psychic double-feeling that comes to us at times, apparently without reason, that what she said was not true. Perhaps gold pieces would no longer be given to members of the board; perhaps there would be no meeting; perhaps—— She seemed to be full of uncomfortable sensations.

Everything was in full progress when Winifred

reached the Bannards', with a great tearing off of muslin and cutting out with large shears, and the soft whirr of sewing machines, and the busy click of knitting needles. Each woman had a deep, unspoken sentiment for the sick or wounded that she would never see; but after the usual horrified remarks on the latest news of the war, and recitals from the letters of soldiers abroad, matters nearer home were taken up.

Pretty, gentle Mrs. Chandor announced the fact that she had bought eight large tomatoes for five cents apiece in the market that very morning; while Mrs. Rickland, a much older woman, confessed that she hadn't been there yet; her girls had been out to a dance until two o'clock the night before, and she had sat up for them.

"Well, at our house Brunhilda and Ermentrude each have a latch-key," said Mrs. Fremer, another matron, of an imposing Roman presence, "their work often keeps them in town so late; but I can't quite make up my mind to let Tucker have one, though his father thinks I ought to; with boys it's so different—you never can tell what they may do. I feel now that I know Tucker's every thought."

There was a moment's delicate silence, which seemed to cover some dissent from this last statement among the listeners.

"Ah!" breathed the elegant Mrs. Roberts, her marble-like dark eyes roving finely around the group. "A woman's influence is so *much*!"

"Well, I've never found her influence amount to

such a great deal," returned the charming Mrs. Silverton; her blue eyes gleamed under their long lashes. "Here I've been for five years trying to teach my husband not to throw his wet towels in a wad on the bathroom floor, and he still does it."

"I think men stay just about the same, no matter what you do," said Nell Crandall comfortably.

"Oh, my *dear!*!" Mrs. Fremer shook her head. "It is easy to pass over these things lightly; but when you see men deteriorating because of the lack of the higher feminine ideal, and because women shirk their duty, it is a very serious matter indeed. *Everything* depends upon the wife and mother! There was Mrs. Laurence, over at the Ridge—she isn't here to-day, is she? She told me herself that her husband wasn't going to vote at the last local election because he wasn't interested in it, and she said to him: 'Will, I haven't the ballot yet, I'm sorry to say, but you *have*, and I think you ought to be ashamed not to use it!' So he voted, though he said it didn't make any difference, for the other side got in as usual. But it's the principle that counts."

Mrs. Roberts nodded solemnly. "You can't get away from it—the responsibility. Of course it puts more on the woman all the time, but we're used to that! Now there is Clementine Wilmer—she isn't here, is she?—the way her husband neglects his business for golf is simply dreadful. He goes past every single afternoon with his clubs. I think she is *very* wrong to allow it. The home depends on the woman.

and the nation depends on the home—you can't get away from that. I think myself that only unmarried men should play golf."

"My husband doesn't like me to stay in the house all the time; he likes me to have something interesting to tell him at dinner," said the swan-necked Mrs. Carpenter seriously.

"Oh, of course," said Winifred, who had been listening deeply to the conversation. She turned now to Mrs. Fremer, who was gathering up her work as she rose to go. "I saw Brunhilda as I came along, Mrs. Fremer; how pretty she looks! I suppose you like Mr. Phillips very much."

"Well, I've only met him once—Brunhilda didn't care to bring him out to the house until after they were engaged," said the mother. "She said he would see enough of the family afterward. I said at once: 'Brunhilda, I can trust to your intuitions; if he suits you, that is enough for me.' Of course she had only known him a short time; still—"

"Oh, goodness, I've begun to think it doesn't make any difference whether you know them two days or two years," said Mrs. Silverton, her eyes sparkling. "You never find out a man's character until you're married to him, and then you don't! They keep doing the most unexpected things!—Has Mrs. Fremer gone? I wouldn't trust to a girl's intuition too much myself. What is it, Winifred?"

"Only that I expect the meeting next Friday to be at my house," said Winifred loudly, with the satisfied thought that the new rug would be there

several days before that. She had made up her mind to clinch the possession of it and stop this feeling of uncertainty.

The mark of care, as Winifred noticed quickly, was still on Leslie's face when he came home, in spite of the afternoon's golf. But he smiled with a swiftly approving glance as he met her dark eyes—Winifred had very clear eyes; a sweet nobleness of purpose, earnestly desirous of all the best things, shone at times unconsciously in them. He touched her cheek with a little affectionate gesture.

"Well, how have things gone to-day?" he asked as they were seated at the dinner table.

"Oh, pretty well." She heroically forbore to mention that the screen doors were still up. "I'm sorry I had to put Matilda to bed before you came. You seem tired; didn't you have a good game?"

"Oh, yes; good enough. I guess I'll have to cut out golf after this, though; it's getting late. We had to let a lot more men go to-day from the shop; it's pretty hard. Oh, the business will come out all right, but it's slow work; it gets me some days."

"Are you still keeping that secretary?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't think that's fair to the others, Leslie, when you can hire a stenographer for half the price."

He curbed a movement of impatience. "You don't understand—I've told you before that he's a protégé of Nichols—it's business to keep him."

"Well, it doesn't seem fair to me."

"All right; suppose we call it even! There's the telephone."

He had leaped to his feet at the sound, and was trying to answer it the next moment. "It seems to be long-distance—Hello! hello! Who did you say? Oh, Mr. *Dorimon*! No, not so busy as we might be. Well, I've about given it up for this season, but—Why, that's awfully kind of you, Mr. *Dorimon*! Sure I will; nicest thing I've heard in a coon's age. Yes, indeed, I'll be there on time. Well, thank you ever so much. Good-bye!"

"What is it?" his wife asked with eager interest as he dropped down in his chair with face alight.

"Well, isn't that fine of the old chap? Wilmer's been trying to get me in touch with him. Mr. *Dorimon*'s invited me out to Boggybrae, with Wilmer. I've always wanted to try that course, but it's so far out I've never had the chance. He says he'll take me up in the machine."

"I thought you just said you'd given up golf for this season."

"Well, Winifred! I didn't mean I'd give up an invitation like that, did I? Use sense."

"When is it to be?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

Winifred stared. "Why, that's the afternoon of the directors' meeting. You can't go, Leslie."

"Oh, I wouldn't let a little thing like that interfere."

"Leslie! 'A little thing like that'—when I want that ten dollars so much!"

“That’s so!” He looked at her with almost comical ruefulness. “Well, what do you think of that? You see, except for the money, there isn’t the slightest use in my going to that meeting, dear.” He softened his rising voice to gentleness. “Nichols controls the board; he knows the whole business; we do just as he says, and there’ll be a quorum without me, anyway. If I could only give you that ten dollars out of hand——”

“You know I wouldn’t take it.”

“Why do you have to get the rug just now, anyway?”

“Why do I have to get it? Because this is so worn and ragged that it’s perfectly disgusting. I can’t have a soul come to the house while it’s down; I have to put a chair over there to cover the hole. I only asked the Red Cross to meet here on Friday because I felt so sure of having it, and now—— Oh, Leslie, if you knew how I hated to hear you talk that way! It makes me feel that I haven’t done my duty at all. It isn’t only the money—it’s the point of view. I do think that when a man accepts responsibilities he ought to live up to them; it just undermines his whole character if he doesn’t! You say there is no need for you to go to such an important thing as a directors’ meeting. Well, there *ought* to be a need, there *ought*——”

“Oh, well——” He looked at her absently, as if he were pondering, but still absurdly crestfallen. “Don’t say any more; I’ll go, of course. I wouldn’t make you pay up for it.”

"But, Leslie, that isn't the way to think of it!" Womanlike, however, having gained her point, she began to yearn futilely over him. "You couldn't do both, I suppose?"

"I should say not. The meeting is at three."

"I wish you could play your old golf! Leslie, it really makes me miserable to have you give it up, but you know yourself it's your *duty* to go to the meeting. And if I don't get that rug now—though that isn't the point——"

"All right, all *right*; the subject is closed," said Leslie, in that tone of his that did close the subject. "I'll call up Mr. Dorimon now and tell him I can't come."

"What did he say?" she couldn't help asking as Leslie came back from the 'phone.

"I couldn't get him; he's gone out for the evening. I'll call him up from town the first thing in the morning," he answered shortly, burying himself gloomily afterward in a book for the rest of the evening.

But later that quality of real kindness and sweetness in him, which scrupulously considered her rights and her happiness, asserted itself; in closing up the house for the night he moved the chair, as if by accident, that covered the big hole in the shabby rug, and said, as he kicked it carelessly with his foot:

"Well, the little girl is going to have her new rug this week, anyway."

"Yes," returned Winifred, with an unexpected recurrence of that odd sensation that she was saying what was not true.

II

THE next day was the most beautiful softly golden one of a softly golden autumn; just the day for golf. Winifred couldn't help hoping that it might rain by afternoon so that Leslie wouldn't have had to give up so much after all. But she couldn't keep from saying to him that morning as he went out through the screen door: "You won't forget to call up Mr. Dorimon?" and he answered, "No; I won't forget, Winifred."

The day seemed rather a long one to her. Mrs. Roberts, over the telephone, embedded in a lava-flow of elegant language the thrilling fact that green peppers could actually be bought two for six cents—cheaper even than in the market!—at a mysteriously distant spot where an Italian family sold vegetables in the home. The fact somehow didn't appeal appetizingly. Mrs. Wilmer called up to say that she and her husband were going away on the morrow for a few days, and how pleased Jack had been that Leslie had the invitation to Boggybrae. She had to leave the 'phone suddenly, and Winifred couldn't explain.

And as the swing of life went, Mrs. Chandor called up to impart, in an awed voice, the word just received that the fair-haired young Englishman who was in her husband's office before the war had been killed in action. Winifred hadn't known him, but somehow the news seemed to set one almost in the dread current of battle: with the pity for those who

were bereaved, it made you feel as if you ought to love those near you more than ever. She almost wished she had let Leslie go to his golf, if it were not for the more serious issue involved.

Just after luncheon, however, little Brunhilda Fremer, red-cheeked and glowing, ran in on her way home from the train for a book, and incidentally to show her engagement ring, a large diamond sunk in a platinum band instead of the traditional gold; the metal might be an innovation to Winifred's sentiment, but the look in Brunhilda's brown eyes as she regarded it held all the tradition of the engaged.

"I think it's awfully *good*," she asserted raptly.

"Was it Mr. Phillips's choice?"

"He hasn't seen it yet," said the bride-elect, still engrossed by the view of her uplifted hand.

"*Not seen it yet!*"

Brunhilda laughed. "That's exactly the way Aunt Julia spoke; she's so romantic! No, I didn't want him along; he is so inartistic. Three of the girls from the Art School went with me to choose it—all he wanted was for me to be suited—and we had the loveliest time! I telephoned him after I'd picked it out. Really, you know I didn't approve of spending so much money on an engagement ring. I could have had all the newest plumbing put in the studio for half the price, and Mother thought I was very foolish not to; but Kelvey preferred the ring."

"Well, I should think so," said Winifred frankly.

"I insisted on his bringing up his law books to the studio and teaching me in the evenings," continued

Brunhilda. "Mother thinks it is so necessary for a woman to help her husband in his work; he needs her intuition, of course, but he needs her knowledge, too."

"I should think it would be almost too much for you, studying law after working as hard as you do all day at your decorating."

"Oh, I don't mind that. Of course we haven't done much reading yet. I say to him every night, 'Kelvey, we really must get down to work!' but there have been so many things to talk about—the furnishings and all that, and lately"—a sudden vivid blush overspread Brunhilda's small round face—"Kelvey is so foolish sometimes," she murmured.

"Of course he is," said Winifred warmly, yet with a feeling that in spite of the girl's theories her Kelvey seemed to be getting his own way most of the time.

"But I must go. I hope I'm not keeping you from Mr. Iverson," said Brunhilda, jumping up.

"Why, Leslie isn't home at this time of day."

"Oh! I thought I saw him on the train I came out in," said Brunhilda, staring.

"You couldn't have! He has an engagement in town at three this afternoon."

"I must have been mistaken then; still—Good-bye!" She seemed suddenly to melt warmly into Winifred's embrace, velvet coat, feathered hat, and all, with something indescribably whole-hearted and confiding in the action. Winifred didn't wonder at Kelvey Phillips's disinclination for spending all his evenings in the study of law.

But why had Brunhilda imagined that she saw

Leslie? If he had broken his word and gone to play golf he would have ridden from town in Mr. Dormon's motor; reason it out any way you would, he couldn't have been where Brunhilda thought she saw him. Once she had herself come face to face in town with the husband of an acquaintance after having just been told that he had gone to another city—it had given her a queer sensation that she had never forgotten. Did men do such things—things they didn't tell their wives?

Leslie was unusually late for dinner; she had almost given him up, when he came in vigorously, tall and fair-haired; his sunny presence seemed to fill the little house.

He kissed his wife with unusual tenderness, smiling down into the dark eyes raised with unconscious questioning to his, and afterward put his hand in one pocket and then in the other, pretending exaggerated surprise and drawing it out empty.

"I hope I haven't lost it! Too bad—you'll have to go without that rug after all. Steady now—steady— Ah, here's the precious ten-dollar gold piece."

Winifred pounced on it, laughing.

"You do behave like such a goose, Leslie. But I'm very glad to have it; I kept fancying that something would interfere." She held him off suddenly at arm's length, voicing a half-suspicion: "You didn't take it from the reserve fund?" The small reserve fund in the bank was sacred, to be taken only in emergency with consent of both.

The corners of his mouth set in a straight line. "No, ma'am, I did not. Isn't this money good enough for you?"

"Leslie, don't, dear; I only thought the meeting might have been postponed."

"Well, it wasn't."

His sunniness shone forth again, yet with a certain anxious earnestness below it. "Now be sure and get that rug to-morrow; that's all I ask. If you don't I'll borrow the money from you."

"Oh, I'll get it," said Winifred gaily.

Yet, after all, she didn't go into town on the morrow; little Matilda had a slight cold. Something each day seemed to prevent. That special tenderness which she had noted on Leslie's part still continued: he brought her a bunch of carnations the next night, which, though somewhat wilted—having been bought "off a boy" in the street—were still floral tokens of affection; he took off the screen doors without being reminded again; he spent all one evening putting washers on the leaking faucets; and he agreed, with only faint demur, to take that unholy walk to the Fremers' on the farthest borders of the town, in acceptance of the invitation to "meet" Brunhilda's young man.

Leslie's behaviour, indeed, was such as to have made a wife with more experience ponder somewhat on its cause. But he also asked every day with unusual interest when the Wilmers would be back, and if she had bought the rug; wanting persistently to know why she hadn't, and urging her to action.

After the fashion of womankind, Winifred, who, while waiting for the price of the rug, felt that she could barely eat or sleep until it was on the floor, couldn't seem to find exactly the right time now to go into town. She calmly let the Red Cross Society meet at her house and work with their feet on the old rug, ragged as it was; she felt so differently about it when everyone knew she was expecting to buy a better one.

"I really am going in for it to-morrow," she said that evening in answer to her husband's reiterated question, before starting out for the Fremers'.

"Yes, I would if I were you; if you wait too long I may pitch this out," he warned her. "Here's an extra dollar for you—you may need a little more leeway in carfare or lunch, or something."

"How is business now?" she hazarded. That line in his forehead had smoothed out somewhat.

He looked at her thoughtfully. "It seems to be a little better—Heaven knows it needed to be! We've had a big order lately." He stopped short. "The Wilmers won't be at the Fremers', you say?"

"They don't get back until to-morrow."

"Well, you get that rug. Perhaps we'd better take a cab after all over to the Fremers'; it's a pretty long distance for you—I tell you we feel it now Father's away with the car."

"No, we'll walk," said Winifred stoutly.

III

EVERYONE was already at the Fremers' when they arrived; people standing in small groups and talking

perfunctorily. The house had a distinctly depressing effect on "company," Brunhilda and Ermentrude having decorated it in accordance with the newest ideas. The drawing rooms—hung in gray and black with immense bronze lamps that sent out about a needleful of light, and a few gleaming legs of chairs and tables showing in the distance—gave an impression of bareness, as of not yet being ready for occupancy.

It was reported, by those who had slept there overnight in the winter-time, that there were never enough covers. The fact seemed somehow indicative.

There was an exception, however, in "Grandma's" room, to which certain favoured guests were conducted on arrival; a cheerful, brilliantly lighted spot of warm red curtains, and sagging, cushioned rockers, and piles of old magazines, and flowered work bags, and crocheted shawls with lavender borders. Wrapped in one of the latter in the midst of these evidences of living, Grandma held court, apologizing scrupulously for not rising on account of her foot.

"I am always glad to see you, my dear," she said to Winifred, who stood before her, radiant in a pretty white evening gown, "and your husband, too." She lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper: "What do you think of my granddaughter's young man?"

"We've not met him yet," said Winifred.

"Oh! Bend lower, my dear. She thinks she's going to twist him around her little finger, but I could tell her a thing worth two of that. He's a rascal

like your husband here—he's a rascal! He'll get his own way every time if he wants to. Ah, I know you!" She shook her finger delightedly, at Leslie.

"Now, Mrs. Whiting, you know you love me," said Leslie laughingly, making way for the next batch of visitors.

"Let's go home now, Win," he murmured, suddenly balking at the door.

"No, we can't go yet," she murmured back, as they descended into the æsthetic gloom of the state caverns, in which the little Brunhilda was now circling around like a small red robin, though she wore a silver fillet on her dark hair, and a classic yellow robe that showed not only her lovely bare white neck and arms, but also her lovely sandaled little bare white feet.

Leslie and Winifred halted by a group of friends: the Chandors and Bannards and Silvertons; the purple-velveted Mrs. Roberts, who was always afraid of losing some pearl of converse, eagerly detaching herself from uninteresting strangers to join the others, as Brunhilda came across the room to them with her young man following a half step behind, and her head leaning back over her shoulder as she spoke to him. There was, however, nothing of the laggard in his mien or expression, which seemed to show an amused aloofness from his surroundings, though his smiling eyes, bent on the upturned ones of Brunhilda, were full of a gleaming, guarded tenderness of ardour that capably bided its time.

Winifred, turning to see how Leslie was regarding them, gazed at him in wonderment. He certainly had a very queer expression, at once surprised, and shamefaced, and uneasy; for a moment he seemed about to start away and go, and then stood his ground as Brunhilda came up.

"This is Mr. Phillips, Mrs. Iverson—I think he's met all the others. Oh, and Mr. Iverson!"

"Well, *we* certainly have met before, haven't *we*?" said Mr. Phillips, shaking Leslie's hand warmly.

"Why, do you know, I thought your name was Hillis," said Leslie, with what seemed somewhat forced heartiness.

"No; Phillips. Mr. Dorimon speaks rather indistinctly sometimes. I met your husband at Boggybrae, Mrs. Iverson, last Wednesday. We had a fine time."

"It couldn't have been Wednesday, for that was the day I persuaded him to go to a directors' meeting, and he brought me home his ten-dollar gold piece," said Winifred guilelessly—and could have bitten out her tongue the next instant.

"It was—ah, Thursday, of course," said Mr. Phillips unwinkingly. "Your husband plays a great game, Mrs. Iverson, a great game!"

The Iversons walked part of the distance home with the Bannards; the rest of the way they were perfectly silent. The stars had come out and the weather had turned colder; their hurrying feet echoed along the frosty pavement with a lonely sound as if

it were very late in the night; the key rang in the lock.

Winifred went upstairs at once. When Leslie entered the room a few minutes later, stepping more heavily than was his wont, she came swiftly toward him.

"There," she said, in a breathless voice, holding out the gold piece at arm's length.

He made a quick gesture of repudiation. "I don't want it!"

"Well, I'm sure I don't!" She threw it down on the table. "I wouldn't touch it now for anything on earth!" Her dark eyes blazed at him, her cheeks burned. Her voice rose: "I would go without a rug forever before I'd buy one with the price of—*lies*; yes, *lies*! When you were planning to deceive me, just for a miserable game of golf. And you were at Boggybrae all the time! I can never forget it, I can never forget that you lied to me. I can never——"

"Stop!" said her husband, in a curiously level tone that yet seemed to carry a controlling force with it. "Stop right now, before you say anything more you'll be sorry for. Sit down in that chair."

His hand gently but firmly pushed her into it, with her head resting against the back. After a moment or two her whole body seemed to relax; the tears began to well up in her eyes and stream down her cheeks. She groped blindly for her handkerchief.

He stooped over and picked it up off the floor. "Here it is." He thrust it into her fingers, and

then sat down beside her, clasping her other hand in his.

“Now, don’t get to crying,” he warned her. “You know it will only make you ill to-morrow. There, that’s better. Now I want you to listen to me. I ought to have told you before, but I knew you’d cut up about the rug—though there’s no need to—and I wanted to wait until you’d sure-enough bought it. I didn’t lie to you, but I let you think what wasn’t so—and I shouldn’t have, that’s true enough.”

A shudder went through her, but a pressure of his hand warned her to control.

“Want to hear the rest? Well, be quiet then. I was so busy Wednesday when I got into town that I hadn’t a minute to call up Mr. Dorimon until late in the morning, and then I found that he’d left the office, and they didn’t know when he’d be back. And just after that Jackson came in and paid me twenty-five dollars I lent him before I was married, and never expected to see again. So I thought it was no harm to take your ten out of that. I caught the train out here to get my clubs and chased back again to meet the motor.”

“Then Brunhilda did see you!”

“Yes. I did want you to get that rug, Win, before I told you! As far as the directors’ meeting was concerned I was only too glad not to have to go to it, as things went. I knew all the time it was really better for me to stay away; you wouldn’t understand, dear, if I explained; there’s too much back of it. You see, you may be all right in theory, Win, but when it

comes to managing my own affairs *I've* got to be the judge. And that couple of hours with Mr. Dorimon did more for me than I could ever have got without it; I'd been trying before to get him to order from us, and Wilmer fixed up this chance for me—I swear I'll never forget it! I've been carrying more lately than I let on to you. Feel better now, dear? I'm going to turn that other fifteen over to you, so that you can buy a hat or—well, I mean something that you need."

"Oh, Leslie, you think me so *foolish!*!" Winifred's words came muffled from his shoulder, where his hand was smoothing her dark hair.

"You bet I don't! I don't think you're foolish at all. You're my sweet wife. Now don't begin to cry again, dear." He lifted her head so that her eyes faced his. "You help me in a hundred ways I don't tell you of; perhaps I ought to, but I can't seem to. Why, some days in the office when I think of you and little Matilda waiting home here for me and how fine and good and true you are, dear, and how much you believe in me, I get all soft; I feel as if I couldn't work hard enough for you. I just feel as if I had a lot to live up to."

"Oh, Leslie!" Winifred clung to his hand with his eyes still plunged into the upturned ones. She sighed, with, however, a little note of comfort in the sigh.

"As if I didn't know I had a lot to live up to, too, dearest—with *you!*!" she protested with sudden, sweet fierceness. "Nothing can ever come between us, can

it, even when I'm horrid. Yes, I *was* horrid, and you know it—— No; don't speak; I *was*! That old Mrs. Fremer—she makes me so cross; but then, poor thing, we all know what *her* husband is. Perhaps it's no wonder she thinks the wife and mother has to be everything!"

"Well, she's a pretty good deal," said Leslie soberly.

BENSON'S DAY

BENSON CLARK, hat in hand, sat in the gilded lobby of the hotel, with its pictorial pink-and-green frescoed walls, just outside the gayly musical tea room, where dancers tangoed carefully between its tables. His lean face—still young in spite of those deep lines in it, as though he had been pulling upstream for a long time—was bent eagerly forward, and his keen eyes, under their straight brows, watched the revolving entrance doors for the first glimpse of Cecelie's light figure lilting in, with that graceful way she had, and her golden head held high. It was a girl's privilege to be late, of course, though he had travelled for two days to see her and should leave the following night.

He had been waiting a long time, but so had others.

It began to seem like a mysterious game, in which the people who were seated watched for those who did not appear, while the newcomers eagerly scanned the lines for those who were not there—only at far intervals two figures scored by matching, in joyful, subdued surprise, before hurrying off together.

Benson was not a dweller in the big city—only coming here on rare trips, like the present, from the mining town he happened to be in. All the sights and sounds—the environment, the people—had for

the moment an agreeable foreignness that produced a vague exhilaration in addition to that absorbing prospect of meeting Cecelie, but with some vaguely depressing undercurrent, because as yet she had not come.

He had forbore to scan too closely the faces of the throng near him for fear of finding some hampering acquaintance—he had travelled enough to be apt to meet people he knew in any scene—but now a large-busted, bare-throated lady, rising from the chair beside him, revealed just beyond a slender, prettily dressed young woman with a delicate profile about which there seemed to grow something pleasingly familiar. As his eyes rested on her she dropped her muff and, reaching for it, let fall a pair of gloves and a pocketbook. The next instant he was before her, stooping for them.

“Allow me, Mrs. Varley! Perhaps you don’t remember me, Benson Clark.”

“Oh, I do—I do!” cried Mrs. Varley. A pretty flush overspread her face as she reached out her hand impulsively to him. “To think that it is eight years since we met, when Ferd and I were on our wedding trip! And you were so good! How did you happen to recognize me?”

“I didn’t quite—until you began dropping things,” he answered with a smile, seating himself beside her, still conscious, as he talked, of every person who passed or entered the revolving doors, with that dual perception that was one of his characteristics. “That brought everything back.”

"Wasn't it silly!" said Mrs. Varley. Her eyes shone with delighted reminiscence as she began talking faster and faster. "And wasn't Ferd cross? I think people on their wedding trip are too funny for anything—neither one knows what the other is going to get deeply injured at. I can see his face now as he was introducing you to me on the hotel steps, and all my letters blew away, and the comb fell out of my hair, and the cologne bottle dropped from my bag and smashed!"

"You laughed," said Benson admonishingly.

"Yes; and that only made things worse. I think Ferd was morbidly afraid that people would think me childish and awkward—and he wanted me to seem perfect." Her eyes brimmed happily. "You were so lovely that day—taking us to dinner and for the drive, and never forgetting me for a moment; and showing all the time that you knew Ferd was really fine, when he was so miserable and grumpy, and couldn't say a word—not a bit like a honeymooner! Real things turn out so different from the way you dream them, don't they? We've often laughed over that day since; but we've always loved to talk of you. I nearly called my youngest child Clark. Are you married?"

"No."

"Why not? You ought to be—a man like you!"

He offered the official masculine answer:

"I can't get anybody to have me. It's true! You have more than one child?"

"Four!" She flashed a proud glance at him.

"The youngest is two—so grown up! I haven't any baby any more." Her tone seemed to have a divine half-regret in it. She broke off: "What have you been doing all this time?"

"Working—mostly." He hesitated slightly before going on; something in her clear eyes seemed to draw him to further speech. "You spoke of real things being different from one's dreams of them—don't you think we ever 'dream true'?"

She shook her head.

"No! Dreams turn out better, often; but, so far as the details go, always different. It's strange how clever they are in eluding us. I always thought my husband would have a tenor voice—and he's Ferd! Oh, here he is now! Ferd, who do you think this is?"

"I won't have to go very far to find out," said Mr. Varley heartily.

He had none of the graces of his wife; but in his large and slightly shabby aspect as a family man his kind smile, shining as through a dusty haze of business preoccupation, showed him to be the good fellow he was. Wealth was evidently one of the dreams that had not materialized.

They all stood talking together, both men with a little tender, chivalrous attitude toward pretty Mrs. Varley in the midst of the more jovial manner. When the couple parted from Benson, after an eager invitation for a future meeting, he sat down once more and watched them as they went off together, with a sort of God-bless-you-my-children-feeling, though Varley ranked him by half a dozen years.

It made him somehow feel lonely. Just this big, simple, commonplace happiness of theirs was what he had grown to long for more than anything else in the world, though the chances seemed less and less that he would ever have it; the mere idea of linking Cecelie with it was like tethering a will-o'-the-wisp to one's hearthstone. All through the pleasant conversation he had been conscious of a gradual sinking of the heart.

The lobby was thinning out; people had drifted off. He realized now—what he had known from the first, with a foreboding to which he had refused to give heed—that she would not, after all her promises, come to meet him. The fact struck him hard.

It was more than four years since they had first met; they had spent a month in the same summer camp together. He had not really known that he had fallen in love until he had gone home—perhaps because the mere fact of being with her had absorbed all power of thought. She was a veritable gleam of a girl—when you left her everything else seemed dark and you could not tell in just what her charm lay. She had that magnetic drawing power which is often independent of the will of its possessor, and which, once felt by the victim, refuses to release its hold.

She was slender and not so tall as she looked; her hair was golden; her eyes varied in colour with her mood; she had a pearly skin, and a red mouth that was as lovely when it drooped as when it smiled.

They swam and fished, and had played tennis, danced and driven together. She was what is called

a good sport. They had tramped in the rain, and they had read lying out under the trees in the sun; she broke her engagements with everyone else for him. She had the courage of her delightfully audacious moods—you never could tell what she might say or do!—and she had also the most irrational timidities, out of which she could not be argued. She had a physical elusiveness that partook of her quality of light.

As soon as Benson reached home he had written to her, asking her to marry him. She had replied very sweetly, pleading for time to decide. He had kissed the letter rapturously, with a fatuous vision of the happiness to be his.

It had been a stern chase ever since. She had never come to any decision—except that he had better give up caring for her, though she would miss him terribly if he did. They had corresponded voluminously. Heavens! What hours he had spent writing to her from his bare room in the hotel in the far Western town—what anguished days when her replies were delayed!

He had been here once or twice a year to see her, flying visits looked forward to passionately for months—only to fail of all satisfaction but that of letting his hungry eyes rest on her in the intervals of her many engagements, and leaving her surrounded by a host of men, with the anguished thought that if he could only stay he might win her. She wrote him candidly of all she was doing—scant comfort in that!

There was the letter in which she thought it right to tell him that she had fallen in love with a young officer, home on leave. Benson would always remember the night after he received that letter—he had walked and walked, out of town and along the railroad track that stretched lonesomely across the prairie—walked until the gray dawn drove him back, his face drawn and his eyes burnt out as if from the heat of the fires of hell. It was two weeks before he heard from her again; then she said, thank goodness, the officer was gone; and she hated every man but Benson.

Then there was that time he would always remember by what he had missed—it was just after his last visit—when she had been too unkind, and in one of her audacious flights she had journeyed thirty-six hours by train to the town where he then lived to tell him how dreadfully sorry she was, and take the return train that left in an hour. And then, in a panic of maiden timidity when she alighted at the station, she had taken that return train without seeing him! She had written and confessed it all. And she had been so near!

After that had come the period when she not only hated men but Benson among them, and had left the world to work among the little children in a settlement for two or three months—and was quite happy because, for once, she was some good in the world; or would have been happy if it were not for a strange feeling at times that there was something wrong about her; she could not seem really to love any one

—not even him!—and so would have to miss what luckier women had. Then she had come back to society gayer than ever.

And once—he reddened now as he remembered that—he had captured her masterfully in his arms and kissed her. She had stood quite still, with an icy disdain that took all the fire from his blood.

“Well, I never! If here isn’t my little Bennie again!”

A clear voice, with a strong English accent, brought him instantly to his feet as a tall lady, passing with a largely moustached gentleman, held out her hand. She had brilliant auburn hair, eyes of intense blue, with artificial shadows below them, and a high colour so natural that it flooded her face as she spoke. Her clinging green silk gown, adorned with dabs of fur, revealed an angular yet graceful thinness; she wore a small straw hat, trimmed with pink rosebuds, gold braid, and a mauve feather, on her vivid hair.

“Mrs. Batsford-Wring!”

“Well, we *do* meet, don’t we? It was the Rawkies last. I haven’t a moment now; but come and see us—we’re visitin’ friends at the Ayreslea. Do now!”

“I’d like to; but I leave to-morrow night,” Benson called after her as she hurried on. Everybody was kind but Cecelie!

Benson had hurried, on his arrival the evening before, to the big house where she lived with her father. After her last letter he had telegraphed her that he was coming. Heaven only knows with what dreams

he always came! She was lovelier than ever as she lilted across the floor to greet him, with her golden head thrown back and her laughing eyes raised to his. She seemed very glad to see him.

The room was filled with a family party. He had talked to her iron-visaged banker father, to large and smiling Aunt Ida, thin and joking Uncle Henry, and fragile old Cousin Bella, who seemed held together with such difficulty that she might dissolve at any minute.

After his first blank dismay he had been patiently sure of a reward. It came as he was leaving: Cecelie had asked him to meet her at the Venetia at half-past four the next day, and they would have their afternoon uninterrupted. And, after all, she had not come! Oh, she never kept her promises—she fooled you every time! What would have alienated in another was only a deeper allure in her; she drew like a magnet, whatever she did. Why must she always fly from him when he was near?

He had an incredibly insistent vision of following after her down a long, dark street of years, when, as fast as she fled, he gradually gained and gained until his arms closed tight round her; and instead of standing icily still in that embrace she leaned to him, with her warm lips upraised to his. Different, indeed, from the reality!

In the intense bitterness that surged over him now existence seemed nauseating; this state of things was sapping at the very roots of life. What a spineless thing he had become! He swore to himself in an

access of cold fury that, one way or another, this time the thing should end.

There she was now—coming down the corridor, with a slight, pale girl and two men; one dark, supercilious, and foreign, the other a tall boy, leaning over her entranced. As Benson jumped up she detached herself from the group and ran forward to meet him, her light figure, under its long fur stole, arrayed in something blue and shimmery that puffed out above and narrowed down close round her slender ankles, the blue feather in her little hat tilting as she stepped.

“Ah, Cecelie!”

As she stretched out both hands sheer delight filled him; her lovely face broke into an irresistible smile when her eye met his, as one who owns herself caught, and confesses and defies and pleads all at once. When she looked like that you could not help smiling, too.

“You don’t know how awfully attractive and gloomy you looked sitting there, with your head on your hand—I actually didn’t recognize you!” She stopped short and stared at him blankly. “You don’t mean to say you’ve been waiting for me here all the afternoon?”

“Oh, I’ve been strolling round part of the time,” he replied, with a startled glance at the clock. “I’d no idea it was so late; but everything’s all right, now you’ve come.”

“Oh, but I haven’t!” she mourned. “I’m with a party. It was an old engagement. When I found I

couldn't meet you I telephoned you; I felt dreadfully about it."

"All right; we'll let it go at that," said Benson, gayly. "Leave your friends now and come with me!"

Her eyes sparkled.

"Very well—I will. Oh, no—I can't!" She looked genuinely distressed. "There's a girl I can't leave—what a shame! I'll tell you—you come with us; it was one of the things I tried to telephone you about. We are to dine and go to the theatre." Her lips took on their coaxing smile; her eyes plunged into his. "Do! You shall sit by me all the time—I promise you."

His face changed. "No."

"Oh, dear! You make me so unhappy!" She gazed at him in tender concern, with that provocative effect of sweetly giving that meant—as he knew so well—instant withdrawal if one presumed on it. "Why do you take everything so seriously?" Her voice dropped to a pleading tone. "Why won't you be good and come with us?"

"Because I'm tired of only seeing you with a ruck of other people. Will you be home to-morrow morning?"

Her eyes grew suddenly misty.

"Why, yes." She added hastily: "I have to go out at eleven."

Benson smiled, a peculiar smile that gave an oddly sweet expression to his worn face and a keener glance to his eyes. "This time I'll be there before you go out," he said significantly.

II

IT WAS, in fact, hardly half-past ten when Cecelie came slowly limting down the brownstone steps of the house, dressed in sober gray, with big gray furs, and a little gray hat pulled down closely over her lovely golden head. She looked thoughtfully up and down the street—the air was cold, the pale blue sky full of white and wandering clouds that had come over from the countryside across the river. Down the block some little children were roller-skating with gay cries; no one else was in sight, as she casually assured herself. As she gazed, a limousine waiting opposite whirled around, stopped, and Benson jumped out, lifting his hat as he came toward her.

“Good morning! I told you you couldn’t escape me this time.”

“Oh, but I was coming back—honestly! I was, indeed. I was only going up to the sewing school,” she protested hastily. “I left word for you to wait for me. I——”

She stopped short suddenly and began to laugh, her eye resting on him with involuntary approval. He looked extremely well groomed and was dressed with particular nicety. His lavender tie harmonized with his brown suit and big overcoat, and the soft hat was brown of a slightly lighter shade; his gloves were of the freshest. His face, usually pale, had a colour in it, and his laughing eyes seemed peculiarly bright. A new exhilaration breathed from him.

“But I’ll go back to the house now. Come on in!”

"No; that's not necessary. I'll take you on to your sewing school—or whatever it is. Let me help you in."

He gave the directions to the chauffeur, stepping in after her hastily and closing the door. As he sat down beside her a certain tenseness in him seemed to relax; he gave a quick sigh of relief.

"Where did you get the limousine?" she questioned.

"Hired it. Oh, I nearly forgot!" He reached down under the seat and brought up a great bunch of violets. "Please put them on at once. Here's the pin."

"I thought I smelled something very sweet," she said gratefully, burying her flower-like face in them. "Confess! Didn't you regret not coming with me last night?"

"Infinitely!" His bright gaze rested on her. "I went to see some nice people I'd met in the afternoon—they're very happy and have four children; you wouldn't be interested to hear of them. But I couldn't stay. Then a man I knew found me and I didn't get rid of him until he became intoxicated. I was wild for you! But I shouldn't have fitted in with your party. I'd have knifed your dark friend and just naturally choked that slobbering youth. The young girl wouldn't have enjoyed herself. What's the matter?"

"Oh, Benson, I wish you wouldn't care for me so much!" said Cecelie. Her eyes were full of tears. She put out her slim, gray-gloved hand and laid it on

his coat sleeve lightly for an instant. "If you knew how I'd thought about you! I——"

"Haven't you cared sometimes, too—a little?"

"Yes—oh, yes—lots! When you're away you seem so near to me; I fancy each time before I see you that it's going to be.—And then it isn't! I only want to get away! I've tried and tried to make myself love you, but there's some dreadful twist in me. I cry sometimes because you're so good to me—honest I do! I couldn't bear you not to care for me any more." Her golden eyelashes drooped; her breath caught. "I've thought sometimes I'd get married and trust to the love coming afterward—but I know I'd go crazy if I felt that I couldn't get free. There was something left out of my composition when the Lord made me—I just can't care for any one."

She buried her tearful face against the violets, as if for comfort from their soft and fragrant depths.

"I wouldn't feel that way about it," said Benson.

Something in his voice made her look up suddenly; her gaze took in the outer scene and her voice changed.

"Why, Benson! We've gone ever so far beyond Fifty-first Street! This is One Hundred and Fourth."

"Yes; I believe it is," he answered, his eyes following hers. "That's all right, though."

"All right! What do you mean?"

"Why"—he fumbled for words under her direct and indignant gaze—"why, it's this way, Cecelie—For heaven's sake, don't look at me like that! Don't get any foolishness into your head; I'm not running

away with you. But you never will give me a chance to see you alone and speak for myself; so this time I've taken it. You're going to spend this day with me." He put up his hand detainingly, as she made a movement forward. "There's no use in your talking to the chauffeur—he's fixed. I've got it all planned out; I'm going to take you up into the country to Paley's. I telegraphed Mrs. Paley from the hotel this morning. I hear there's almost nobody there—this time in the week. We'll have a walk in the woods afterward and there'll be the long ride home. It's my last throw! You'll either consent to marry me this evening, dear—oh, in your father's house!—and go back with me to-morrow morning, or I drop out, so far as you are concerned. There'll be no more of me ever."

"You want me to marry you to-night?"

"That's what I said."

She laughed.

"It does sound funny, doesn't it?" he answered with a responsive smile. "Hello!"

The car had slightly slackened its pace in avoiding a construction truck that took up all the road. Swift as lightning Cecelie's hand was on the catch of the door—in another instant Benson's arms were around her, dragging her back, while she fought him wildly. Then there was a moment's fierce and silent struggle until he held both her hands in his capable grip, and gently forced her down on the seat.

"Don't do that again!" he ordered sternly. "You little wildcat! Do you want to kill yourself?"

“You’re not behaving like a gentleman!” she flared at him furiously.

“All right; let it go at that.”

“You’re making me hate you—really!”

“Very well, only don’t try jumping out again; it won’t work! You can’t catch me off my guard.” His voice changed irritably. “For—heaven’s—sake! Can’t I for once have what I want—when it’s so little—without all this fuss about it? You know you’d go off for a motor ride with any one else without turning a hair.”

Her face contracted, she moved herself disdainfully as far away from him as possible into the blue-cushioned corner, her gray furs half round her. Her hair looked very golden, her skin very pearly, her lips very red—but there was a stony expression in the gray eyes that gazed past him. Benson’s eyes were fixed on her.

They were whirling along now over the post road under the wintry sky, away beyond the confines of the city, with woods or fields or scattered houses on each side, and an occasional gateway leading into one of the big country places. They rode on and on and on—in silence.

Never had her magnetic charm been greater; yet, with the quick perception of a lover, Benson was conscious that in this apparent success of his temporary capture of her he had lost something; a slight instinctive leaning toward him, which he had always felt unerringly under all her caprices, had changed, with the merest hint of compulsion, into a steely

resistance that might turn at any moment into downright dislike.

He grimly foresaw only failure at the end of his day, yet his exhilaration remained. Who that says he has no hope really has none? We get ahead in life by counting the milestones to the hopes we never reach! He wondered how much her pretty shoes cost, with a tender sense of possession; for the time being she was his anyhow.

Suddenly Cecelie hid her face in her arm, she shook from head to foot.

"What's the matter?" he asked, bending over, in quick distress. "Cecelie—you're not feeling so badly as that, dear? Cecelie!"

"Don't," she said, in a strangled voice, and suddenly raised her face. She was shaking with laughter. "Oh, dear!" she gasped. "It's all so perfectly ridiculous! You sit looking at me, with your eyes getting bigger and bigger, like an owl's. It's anything but se-se-ductive. Oh, dear!" Her voice rose piercingly in peal after peal, with a caught breath in between.

"Stop!" said Benson peremptorily, as her voice became an hysterical shriek. "Stop! Stop! Stop! The people in the two cars that just passed us are looking back—one is turning round! We'll have the police after us. Stop, Cecelie! Stop, I say!"

"I can't—I can't!"

"Yes, you can. You hear me? You must!"

"I can't—I can't!"

"You must." The contagion of a smile spread to

his own face, but the control in his voice reached her. "There, there! You're letting up a little. Lie back in the cushions and rest. Heavens! What a care you are to me!"

"Yes; I hope you realize that," she said defiantly. "I don't see what you brought me out for if you're only going to sit and stare at me."

"Oh, we've got plenty of time to talk. For one thing, I was wondering how much your clothes cost—I see you'll be an awful bill of expense to me! But I fancy I can stand it—I've been saving up for four years." His voice changed. "Another thing I was thinking of—you remember that 'Last Ride,' by Browning, you used to read to me in Maine? I'm not much on poetry, you know, but I liked that. I was imagining now how we might go on like this forever—in a limousine! That's modernizing it with a vengeance, isn't it? I'm counting a lot on that ride back this evening. Suppose the world did end to-night?"

"Benson, don't!" she said plaintively. "I'm beginning to feel queer." She put out her hand with an appealing little gesture. Her red lips quivered; her lovely eyes sought his.

"Benson! Benson, I'm tired. If you love me take me home. You don't know how nice I'll be to you; honest, I will! Please do."

He looked at her searchingly—her eyes shifted; her eyelids fell. He smiled and slowly shook his head.

"Sorry; but I can't."

She flushed hotly and drew quickly over into her corner.

“Then take the consequences!” she said, and turned her face from him.

III

PALY'S was seventy miles from town. In summer it was a charming place—all a green latticework of dining balconies overlooking the woodland and the inlet; but in the frozen winter it had a somewhat chilly and meretricious air, like a lady in a low-necked muslin standing on the ice. The small room, however—empty as Benson had hoped it would be—was warm with crimson rugs and a leaping fire; the cloth on the little table set for two seemed dazzlingly white, the silver and glass on the oaken shelves unusually glittering. There was an atmosphere of warmth and hominess about the place; Mrs. Paley herself, rosy-cheeked and white-aproned, came forward to welcome them, and led Cecelie away to take off her wraps.

The little meal, when it was served, was charming, the waiter assiduous, his eyes popping out intermittently like rabbits from behind a bush. The only drawback was that Cecelie, lovelier than ever in the glow of the fire, sat with one elbow on the table, her head turned away, looking out of the window at the frozen inlet and the tall lightning-scarred tree in the distance—in the far top of which dangled something that the waiter explained was a fish-hawk's deserted nest—and refused, in

spite of Benson's consternation, even to taste anything.

"But don't let that make any difference to you," she urged amiably. "Eat all you want."

"Oh, I will!" he replied coolly, yet with a chagrin it was impossible not to feel.

He had looked forward to that little meal alone with her, had been boyishly desirous that everything should be of the best, and that it should please her. He was a hungry man; but it is hard to eat enjoymentily through a bill of fare with a speechless vis-à-vis who will not so much as drink a glass of water with you. The waiter's assiduity became more and more agitated; he bent lower and lower with each dish, until he seemed almost to be proffering it on bended knee to the beautiful lady, who always refused.

There were voluble, half-heard conversations in the kitchen. Mrs. Paley herself appeared again, deeply solicitous. Was there anything the young lady would like? It could be cooked in a moment. Cecelie's golden lashes lifted; her eyes responded sweetly as well as her voice:

"Thank you so much; but I really don't want anything."

Benson could hardly help fondly smiling at the effect she produced; but he pushed his dessert away from him untasted at last.

"I would like to shake you!" he stated soberly.

"Well, I never!" said a clear voice, with an English accent. "Well, we *do* meet, don't we?"

Benson turned and sprang to his feet. From the side door the auburn-haired Mrs. Batsford-Wring was approaching. She wore the furry green silk and yellow straw hat, with a motoring coat over her arm, and was followed by the gentleman of the night before, tall and robustly bony, with a big moustache slightly streaked with gray, well-cut features, and a military bearing.

"What a surprise!" said Benson, shaking hands.

"This is my brother, Captain Hawkly, just back from Africa," announced Mrs. Batsford-Wring. "Oh, I've told him about me little Bennie! The motor broke down with us; we left it in the road with the chauffeur, and came over here for some tea before taking the train to town."

"Miss Sherwood, this is my friend, Mrs. Batsford-Wring, who nearly saved my life once—when I was ill at Baden—and earned my undying gratitude—and her brother, Captain Hawkly," said Benson formally. "Miss Sherwood is the daughter of Mr. Nevitt Sherwood, of whom you may have heard."

"How d'ye do? Some people are so particular about whom they meet when they're travellin'—but I'm nawt," said Mrs. Batsford-Wring pleasantly, with a stare at Cecelie, who was deeply observing in her turn, while the captain's glance fell on her, with the instantly resulting gleam. "Bennie's not tellin', though, of the time he pulled me out of the snowbank by my leg, in the Dakotah blizzard. *That was a night!*"

"I should say so! And how is Mr. Batsford-Wring?" asked Benson, smiling.

"He came a cropper in the huntin' field a twelve-month ago—and the best thing for everyone, too," said his widow calmly. "Poor Batty! He always was a filthy brute—I never liked him. And you? Are you not married yourself?"

"No, indeed," said Benson, with an involuntary look at Cecelie, who, slim and graceful as a willow wand, was talking to the admiring captain.

"Shall we have some tea together?" pursued Mrs. Batsford-Wring hospitably. "You were very late finishin' your luncheon, weren't you?—but a cup of tea is refreshin' at any time. Now don't look at your watch, Bennie; you can't hurry off when we've so much to talk over. You'll have tea with us, Miss Sherwood?"

"Indeed I will!" said Cecelie gayly.

In the slight bustle that ensued in getting another table set and the preparation of tea things, Benson found a furtive chance to press the hand by his side—a yearning, clinging touch, light as it was, that seemed to say: "Ah, understand how much I want to get off to walk with you!"

There was no response, however. Her eyes when they met his had an elfish, mocking light in them. His face reddened for an instant and then turned pale, set enigmatically in its lines of habitual patience.

The tea-table episode, however—if it were not for that restless knowledge of how many precious moments he was losing—was not in itself unpleasing.

Mrs. Batsford-Wring had the English woman's soothing official attitude toward that superior being, man. After ordering for her brother the special accessories he liked, and sending back his toast to be done over, and jumping up to pull down the blind a trifle to shade his eyes, she had solicitously placed a screen between Benson and the fire, and then sat with her graceful lankiness drooping toward him, and her enormous violet eyes waiting on his as she offered up autobiography, anecdote, or sentiment for his entertainment.

Benson was to call her by her pet name, Chickie, as he used to do. She deftly cast a web of comfort round him. Once or twice, indeed, he shot a glance at Cecelie, which said, dominantly: "This game is not over yet, wait until my time comes!" while she smiled beneath her golden lashes at the captain's handsome face, her light figure, with its suggestion of withdrawal, her head tilted back as she leaned forward, proving, as ever, a magnet.

She seemed to murmur only provocative monosyllables to his persuasive eloquence, which was punctuated by the loud hawhaws of his delighted enjoyment. Once Benson heard him murmur:

"*I am a silly ass! If you'll only tell me what you want me to say—*"

And her answer:

"*I'll tell you later if I get a chance.*"

And his again:

"*Oh, if that's all, you'll get it!*"

The remarks served to cut short the tea-hour;

Benson stood up suddenly and, excusing himself, went to settle with the beamingly talkative Mrs. Paley, and to interview the chauffeur. There was time yet for that planned walk with Cecelie before the return; but when he came back into the room Mrs. Batsford-Wring was there alone, stretched out indolently in a big chair by the fire.

“Your young friend was tellin’ us that you and she are only by way of bein’ chummy,” she stated. “She says it’s quite the thing here—you go off for the day without any preparation at all, you just tellyphone home; so simple, isn’t it? My brother is all for making what you call a date—is it not?—with her.”

“And where is she now?” asked Benson, looking around.

“She’s gone out walkin’ with him—they’re so interested in the fish-hawk’s nest,” said Mrs. Batsford-Wring. “Ah, what is this? Are they coming back already?”

Cecelie’s face appeared in the doorway, with Captain Hawkly towering over her.

“I just ran back for an instant,” she announced sweetly, “to ask you to return in the car with us, Mrs. Batsford-Wring—you and your brother—instead of going by train. We can take them as well as not—can’t we, Benson?”

Her tone faltered unexpectedly over the last words as she looked at him. There was a slight pause in which some strange tingling electrical disturbance made itself felt.

Then he answered:

“Certainly; that's a fine idea!”

There was a note in his voice she had never heard before. His face seemed to have changed to a coldness—a sternness—an indifference—so that he was no longer the same person. He began to laugh suddenly.

“You come and see the fish-hawk's nest with me, Chickie!” He waved his hand to the others. “Go on! We'll follow.”

IV

THE path down which they walked slowly led over roots, briars, rocks, slippery dead leaves, and the tangled, sinuous underbrush of winter, on which Mrs. Batsford-Wring's gown left little dabs of fur in spite of all Benson's assiduous efforts in her behalf.

Chickie's colouring did not seem so barbaric out of doors amid the general brownness and russet, the white gleam of the frozen inlet, and the brilliance of the sun—a crimson ball before its setting. She certainly had a nice way with one. She wanted to be kind; to please him. It gave him a sudden warm sense of gratitude; he veered with fierce impatience from any thought of his former fond imaginings of this day that was to have been his. What was it that Mrs. Varley had said? “Things turn out so different from the way you dream them!”

He lingered with Chickie along the way; but when they finally reached the objective point the other two were there, sitting on a big, jutting stone in the midst

of the dead leaves and the brown and beaten sedge, Cecelie with a downcast face and the captain murmuring in her ear.

The tree stretched bare and gaunt far, far upward; above swung the deserted nest, from here a small rough black-and-white mass, to which the fish-hawk in his days of wild and fierce living, six feet of him from strong wing-tip to wing-tip, had triumphantly brought his gleaming prey. Some sort of existence that—to swoop and strike and take and soar again, one's object accomplished, up, up into the wide kingdom of the sky and the safety of the winds and the rocking branches!

“And what is that hanging from the nest?” asked Mrs. Batsford-Wring idly.

“It must be a feather,” said Benson, bending over her. “Would you like it as a souvenir?”

“Very much—but you couldn't possibly get it, dear boy.”

“Oh, couldn't I!” He laughed and stood up, beginning to take off his coat. “Just watch me.”

“Benson! Don't,” said Cecelie sharply.

He turned in surprise, as though he had forgotten that she was there.

“Why not?”

“Mrs. Paley told me that lots of boys have tried to get the nest and couldn't. You can see where the lightning struck—those jagged branches may not hold you.”

“Oh, the tree's all right.”

“But, Benson! Please!” Her colour flickered.

"I ask you not to. It's idiotic; I hate to see people in high places—it makes me dizzy."

"But Mrs. Batsford-Wring wants the feather," he argued seriously. "And if she wants it she must have it."

"Well, you *are* rather a dear, aren't you?" said Mrs. Batsford-Wring caressingly.

"Oh, he's sporty," agreed the captain. "If he fails, I'll bring it down for you, Miss Sherwood."

"I won't fail!" said Benson.

He gave a slight run and threw himself at the trunk of the tree, his feet grappling for a foothold; his wiry form swarmed up until he reached the first branch and stood out on it erect, his figure black against the crimson light beyond, before he turned and swung himself agilely upward, testing with eye and hand each jagged branch or stump before bearing his weight on it—up and up and up, with a clean, pulse-filling joy in the keen usage of his powers, until he reached the swaying nest and triumphantly waved the feather to the watching group below.

He rested a moment before attempting the descent, looking out over this brave new world—there was an invigorating tang in the air, the silver of the inlet reflected a rosy glow, the hoarse caw-caw of a swiftly flying crow broke against a wide, rarefied stillness.

"Well, he *can* climb, can't he!" said Mrs. Batsford-Wring. "Really he's quite an extraor'n'ry man, you know, Miss Sherwood; he does everything so well. The tales they tell of him out in Dakotah! My word, but those women at the ranch were mad

over him! I thought he'd be married by now to the little Dalgarnie girl; but it seems he's nawt. Well, Bennie, you're back to earth again, aren't you?" Her violet eyes welcomed him.

Cecelie's face had flushed unaccountably. Was this the Benson she knew?

"And here's your feather, Chickie," he said, touching Mrs. Batsford-Wring gently on the cheek with it before handing it to her.

It was already dusk when the party at last started on the way back. Cecelie, looking stealthily at Benson from time to time, felt strangely removed from him as she sat slim and straight by Mrs. Batsford-Wring, with the two men opposite. Something seemed to have gone from him—it was as if, though he was conventionally polite, he no longer had any sense of her presence. It gave her a frightened feeling, and Cecelie was not used to feeling frightened.

His keen, bright eyes met hers with no suggestion of interest in them—his lips had a line she had never seen before; he looked both cold and hard.

She had whispered, with sudden compunction, before they entered the car:

"I'm sorry—I'm sorry we are not to have our Last Ride together!"

And he had answered aloud casually:

"Oh, it makes no difference at all, really!" It was strange to look at her and feel that what he said was true.

Mrs. Batsford-Wring frankly composed herself for sleep, in which she had a brilliant cubist effect.

Benson and the captain kept up an interested conversation on the sports in Africa and how they differed from those in the States, while the former kept up that double tide of thought which was not exactly thought, but a sensation through everything of being free. It was as though he had been wounded so deeply that there was no more feeling left—something had been killed in him. He might wake some day to worse pain than ever; but just now it was entirely gone.

Cecelie sat with her golden head against the cushions, her red lips slightly parted, her eyes flashing out under their golden lashes; that soft, bright pearliness of hers and her magnetic charm were never more apparent.

Captain Hawkly's continually staring eyes took note of her. Benson, for the first time in years, could gaze and feel no thrill or any desire for her—the girl he had loved so wildly! Why had he ever loved her? Why had he thought she would care some day—as he had always persistently, in spite of everything, felt in his heart she would? That was what had made him constant, had given him hope, had made him masterfully take this last stand. It was all over now—and the beauty of it was that he did not care!

It was a long, long ride back—that ride to which he had so looked forward. Cecelie bent over once—ostensibly to pick up her handkerchief—as the car whizzed over a bridge, the lights above reflected in the black water that stretched out beyond on each side.

"Don't look at me like that!" she whispered fiercely between her little white teeth.

"I beg your pardon," he responded quickly in the same low tone. "I wasn't conscious that I was looking at you at all, truly!"

"I didn't ask you to bring me out!" she said, as though in answer to some voiced aspersion.

"No, no; of course you didn't," he replied at once. "It was all foolishness on my part. The whole thing is done with. Suppose we just let the subject drop."

"Very well," she assented, trying to keep back the unexpected tears.

Mrs. Batsford-Wring emerged from her doze.

"How you do fidget," she said amiably to Cecelie.

It was a long, long ride—perhaps Cecelie was feeling that she had lost something, too, though she talked gayly to the captain.

They were speeding along the smooth post road at last, rapidly nearing the town. Now the lights of the city came into view, the houses growing closer and closer together—more lights, and noise and clatter.

"And here we are!" said Benson as the limousine stopped before the Sherwood mansion. He helped Cecelie up the steps after her adieus to the other guests, while the machine still stood waiting. "I'll begin to say good-night to you now, so as not to keep you standing here."

She looked up in blank surprise.

"Why, aren't you coming in?"

"No; I think not, if you'll excuse me."

"But, Benson! There are ever so many things

I've been counting on saying to you—all the way home. I expected you to come to dinner, of course—I—”

“I'm sorry; but I promised Mrs. Batsford-Wring to go back with them to the Ayreslea—they've some sort of party on hand to-night. And, by the way, I am afraid this will have to be good-bye, too, for some years. It's not likely that I'll see you again; I leave to-morrow.”

The door was wide open now; the warmth streamed out from the brightly lighted interior as they still stood there, her lovely face raised perplexedly to his.

“Not see me again! But I don't understand. Why do you talk that way? Benson, you're not like yourself—your eyes are so dark—you look so proud.”

He smiled involuntarily.

“Don't let my looks bother you,” he responded gently; adding, with a deeper note: “I shall always thank you for many kindnesses in the past—believe that, Cecelie! You'd really better go in—you'll take cold standing here. Good-bye!”

He smiled again, took off his hat, ran down the steps like one very glad to go away, and disappeared in the limousine, which went whirring down the street.

V

THAT was a fine night! Benson did not know when he had enjoyed himself so much, with a strangely unthinking pleasure that seemed to have no

connection with either past or future, but to be just the outcome of the gay moment.

After the little dinner with Chickie and the handsome captain, augmented by the presence of a sprightly young English artist and his pretty wife and young sister, the party had gone forth to take in the more conventional Bohemian shows.

They had danced experimentally, with much laughter, until after midnight, and supped after that. Mrs. Batsford-Wring, frankly solicitous for the pleasure of all the men, gave her pervading atmosphere of comfort to the evening, with a special little undercurrent of real warmth for Benson which touched him deeply.

"You'll not be wantin' me for a partner long," she warned him at the beginning of the revel. "My brother says I dahnce like a horse."

"Yes—and a spavined one at that, you know," put in the captain.

"My word! But that *was* a nasty one, wasn't it?" said his sister agreeably.

"Oh, you can't scare me off that way!" said Benson. "You'll certainly dance as well as I do."

"You're lookin' a lot more fit than you were; it's a pity I cahn't take you in hand oftener, isn't it?" she murmured once as, his arms around her, her graceful lankiness dipped and reared wildly to the rhythm of the music.

Benson's "Yes," gave quick assent; his hand pressed hers warmly.

"You're the kindest woman I ever knew, Chickie."

"Well, I've had some rawtten times myself, you know!" she answered simply, pressing his hand in return.

Though it was so late when he got to bed in the small hotel where he always stopped, he rose early to a day that from his high window was all a blue winter sky and a gilding sun on the housetops, and smoke-wreaths mingling with the light. He was shaving, and whistling during the process, when the telephone on his stand rang; he put down the razor to answer it.

"Hello!—Yes, this is Mr. Clark. Who is this?"

"Benson—it's Cecelie."

His face underwent a hardening change.

"Yes—Cecelie."

"Benson, I—I called you up so early because I was afraid you might go out. You forgot to leave me your address."

"I really don't know yet where I'm going to be."

"Oh! Benson—"

He curbed a rising irritation.

"Yes; I'm waiting."

Her voice reached him sweetly:

"I want you to come and see me this morning, Benson."

"I'm afraid it's impossible. I can't get so far up town again before I go. I have business appointments."

The thought of going to that house again—of walking up those brownstone steps as he had too many times before—was suddenly repugnant to him beyond words. He could not do it.

“But, Benson”—the lightness of her tone had changed to one of appeal—“I must see you before you go; honest, I must!” The familiar accents seemed to set some chord vibrating that he desired above all things not to feel. She went on: “If you can meet me at the Venetia—that’s on your way—at ten o’clock, or before—any hour you say—I’ll only, keep you for a few moments. Benson, please!”

There was a pause.

“Very well,” he answered at last reluctantly. Make it three o’clock, then—I’ll be there if I can on my way to the train. I’ve got to ring off now.”

Why had she called him up? It shadowed the day for him; it tethered him still to all that bitter past which he wanted to be done with. He finished his shaving, but he no longer whistled at it.

It was long after the appointed hour when he entered the revolving entrance doors he had watched all that other memorable afternoon for the sight of Cecelie. She was sitting now—as a quick glance showed him—almost where he had sat, the lobby and the corridors filled as before, her slender figure slightly drooping forward over the big gray muff, and her golden head leaning on one hand.

Her face, as she raised it smilingly to his, gave him a start—her eyes looked very large; there was a strange translucence in the unusual pallor of her cheeks, but she had still that drawing quality which a person might curiously observe even without feeling it. She rose eagerly and went forward to greet him.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come! I've been waiting a long while."

"Yes; I was afraid I shouldn't be able to get here at all," Benson said formally. "I haven't much time now."

"Shall we go where we can talk?" she asked him.
"Just as you say."

She lilted across the empty space of a big drawing room, her head thrown back as usual, to a windowed alcove half concealed by heavy red curtains that shut in the immense cushioned armchairs in which they seated themselves. He could not help thinking cynically that she seemed to know the place very well, as he sat facing her with that new look in his eyes, one hand lying on his knee, waiting for her to begin, while she leaned forward.

"Benson, I'm so sorry about yesterday! I"—she went on with hurried lightness in spite of the slight stiffness that came over him—"I didn't know it was going to be like that to you—honest! I only thought—" Her agitation grew; she twisted her slender hands together. "No! You must let me speak. I only meant—I thought it would be just something to laugh over afterward; I—Benson—" She faltered; the great tears suddenly brimmed in her lovely eyes, but she smiled through them. "I know I've been such a horrid girl! But last night—I found out what it was to care—at last. I didn't know it could hurt so much; but—but—I do care for you! It's—it's dreadfully funny, isn't it—that I do?"

He had put up his hand at first as though to stop her, listening afterward with a forced patience; but now his face reddened violently—a strange tremor seemed to shake him. He looked round desperately as one seeking to escape from something dread and mastering. His eyes searched her face and a bitter smile overspread his.

“Oh, I don’t believe you care—as much as you think now,” he said. “It’s very good of you—but it wouldn’t last, you know; you’ll feel quite differently to-morrow. I’d better go now, Cecelie.”

“But, Benson——”

She had risen to her feet now—as had he—drawing farther back into the shelter of the curtain, her eyes hanging on his. He stood, irresolute. The words came as if in spite of himself:

“Would you marry me now—and go back with me?”

She shrank instinctively, with drooping head.

“Oh, Benson——”

He raised his eyebrows, spreading out his hands as he spoke.

“You see! That’s what it all amounts to. There’s no use of my staying.”

“You don’t believe me?”

“No, I don’t.”

“But you shall!”

She flushed and paled, looking wildly around her; and then, like one who suddenly hurls herself from all hampering bonds, her arms—trembling—reached up round his neck and clung there; her lips—trembling

too—reached upward for his; her exquisite magnetic charm stole through every sense.

“Oh! Oh, you must believe me now! Never—never for any man but you, Benson! I want to sit by your hearth; I want to be in your home—always; I want to—to be your wife—now—this minute—any time you say!”

Was that a sob he gave as his strong arms closed around her, and that mighty tide of love rushed back over him?

His day? Oh, Mrs. Varley was right; better than any dreams of it—far, far better!

DANCE-MAD BILLY

MR. WILLIAM STERLING was pacing the floor of the comfortable brown-and-yellow living room of the apartment, occasionally taking a few unconscious steps to the music of a fox-trot played on a phonograph below—he was very fond of dancing, though his wife didn't care for it—and knocking the ashes of his pipe between times into strange and unwarranted receptacles, while his eyes sought the small room at one side in which was visible a table containing a draughting board, papers, measuring implements, and a lighted lamp with a green shade. He made several movements toward the chair fronting it; drawing back, however, as if sharply pulled by a string. He was a slender man of thirty-odd, not very tall, with thick, dark hair that stood up from a square forehead, a straight nose, a rather large mouth, very brilliant, far-apart eyes, and a tense expression.

He was going through that awful period which comes to all people of creative endeavour—poet, author, artist, straight through to the master mind of the business man, yea, even to that of the woman who plans the wonderful gown she is to make herself—when after the inspiration, the clear vision evolving out of space of a New Thing, triumphantly perfect,

the illumination gradually fades, leaving something inexpressibly hackneyed and futile in its place.

In a dull and anxious season indeed for a young architect with a wife and two little boys to support, Mr. Sterling had lately been working both at the office and at home, at the behest of a heaven-sent Mr. Atterbury, long resident abroad, on the plans for a Moorish villa, dreamed of by Mr. Atterbury's wife, that should be Moorish-American, rather, with plenty of windows, bath-rooms, and closets, and steam heat even for the Oriental, glassed-in sleeping roof. There were to be a miniature courtyard, and fountains and pillared spaces and grille-work and rich colouring, but there was to be a homelike effect withal, as of something indigenous to the soil. Mr. Sterling had seen the airy structure rise before him with all difficulties triumphed over, incredibly harmonious, winning reputation for him at a stroke. Now, after three weeks of hard labour, the plans laid on paper had become more and more imposingly unoriginal; the very magnitude of his opportunity began to be stultifying to his jaded brain. If he could only "get back at himself," and start anew—it was possible, if you knew how, to catch on again.

He looked up suddenly to see the little figure of his wife, in her dainty white gown, a long string of blue beads around her neck, coming toward him. She was a pretty young woman with small features, a very sweet mouth, a great deal of ruddy hair, and anxious blue eyes. She had that look of strain, with

an indication of fine lines in her face, making her older than her years warranted, that is the mark of women who take more responsibility than they should have, or perhaps than they need to take. She put her hand now on his arm while she said—as it was her “job” to say:

“Isn’t it time you were getting down to work, Billy?”

“Oh, yes, of course; but I can just tell you this, Tips—if everyone in the house begins piling in here as they did last night I might as well give up from the start. I can hear every blessed word in there. Oh, heavens, Nora’s letting in that darned bride now! Her voice drives me crazy.”

“Hush, dear! I’ll try to take her in the dining room,” said his wife rashly. “Why, how do you do, Mrs. Bird?”

“Oh, dear, I know I oughtn’t to bother you, but I just had to go to someone,” said the newcomer, a very tall, fair young person in the extremely elaborate raiment of the trousseau. She had a would-be fetching air of helplessness; her large eyes turned from Tips to Billy, who, with his eyes cast down, stood with both hands thrust into his pockets. “We’ve been in such a state! I forgot and threw a few coffee grounds in the sink; and James is so clever, he unscrewed the trap or something to clear it out, and the people below came up again to complain. They were quite horrid at being flooded out. James has an awful fit on now—he’s reading; he doesn’t seem to want to talk at *all*, and you can imagine how pleas-

ant that is for me! So I came up to you. Oh, my goodness, that isn't Mr. Blodger, is it? Then I'll just run. I don't see how you stand him."

She dashed out, almost colliding with a very large, square-shouldered, square-bearded, negligently dressed man, with a dreary expression, who, with only a responsive nod to greetings, walked over to the table.

"You haven't a book to lend me? Myra's gone to a concert. She tried to get me to go, but I hate concerts. Thank you, I've read that. Yes, I've read that, too. Yes, I've read that! I thought you might have something new. Well, don't bother, Mrs. Sterling; it really doesn't matter. Probably I wouldn't be able to read, anyway."

"Isn't your head any better?" asked Mrs. Sterling sympathetically, with a reproving glance at her husband, who with set lips and lowering brow stood by the mantelpiece.

A deep interest showed instantly in Mr. Blodger's face.

"It's a singular thing, a very singular thing; sometimes I seem to be entirely free from it—the throbbing, I mean, not my head, of course; but the minute I think of it, it's there—just the same old thing! I fear an attack is coming on now; if you'll excuse me, I'll go."

"Well!" said Billy Sterling. He wildly confronted his wife. "How do you suppose I can originate anything in this atmosphere? How? Tips, I've got to get out of this; I——"

“Oh, Mrs. Sterling!” called a nearing voice from the hallway.

A little girl of twelve in an extremely short white frock, and an enormous pink bow on her long curls, bounded into the room. Her face had the look, at once infantile and deeply accustomed, that bespeaks the only child among grown-ups. She stopped to make her bob curtsey before going on rapidly:

“Oh, Mrs. Sterling, Mother wants to know if you and Mr. Sterling won’t come right down and dance to-night? We’ve got our new records. Miss Blend and her brother are there now.”

Billy made an involuntary step forward, but to his eager “Ah, come on, Tips,” she only shook her head decisively.

“No. No, Mary, I’m very sorry, but I’m afraid we can’t come to-night. Tell your mother I don’t dance the new dances, but it was very kind of her to think of us.”

“Oh!” said the child, without moving. She regarded the two with sparkling eyes, before starting in with a rush: “Mother says she thinks married people are awfully tiresome when they never want to do the same things; it makes it so inconvenient to invite ’em! Mr. Sterling likes to dance and you don’t, Mrs. Sterling; and Mrs. Walker does and Mr. Walker doesn’t; and Mrs. Vere loves bridge and Mr. Vere won’t touch a card; and Cousin John’s crazy over his boat and Cousin Min won’t put her foot on it! Mother says, honest to goodness, she’d try and act as if she liked the same things Dad did if it killed

her; and if he was as mean as Mr. Vere, she'd have no use for him! I'm going now. Good-night!"

"Good-night," said Billy, laughing. "Fresh kid, all right, isn't she, dear?"

He put up his hand to cover the one his wife had tenderly laid on his arm.

"But why couldn't we have gone down there to-night, Tips? It would have done me a world of good."

"Yes, and while you were dancing, I'd have to sit out with that stupid Uncle Joseph."

"Why don't you learn the new dances, then?"

"Because I don't like them! When I *did* want to dance just after we were married, *you* didn't want to, either! I wish you wouldn't make me say all this over again, Billy. You know perfectly well that dancing isn't good for you—if it were I'd put my own feelings aside—you know that; but it's all so utterly silly. You let yourself be switched off from your work by the slightest distraction, as it is. Here you have that plan to finish; you were just crazy about it at first, and now——" She began to wink suspiciously though her voice was still patient and gentle. "You let yourself get so careless about everything—even money; you drop change everywhere! If you think it is easy for me to have to try to keep you up to the mark all the time——"

"No, no, of course not," said her husband absently. From the first word the rest of her discourse had been a foregone conclusion. "I'll get to work now. Where did I put the matches?"

"Now, Billy dear, don't smoke any more to-night!"

Her eyes, as blue as the beads around her neck, dwelt on him imploringly. "You know what the doctor said: if you smoked more than——"

"All right!" He kissed her hastily, dexterously abstracted a box of matches from the mantel-shelf on his way to the other room, and shut the door. Whether he smoked or not the effect was the same, now, in an extreme irritation that might grow at any minute into that silent but shattering fury that is more subversive of work than anything in the world; this very effort at control jarred him out of gear and—worse. Oh, heavens, he was already in the throes of it! He gazed at the table before him through the waves of bitterness that were overwhelming his dulled brain. Tips had got into the habit of objecting to anything he wanted on the score of its not being good for him; there was that second cup of coffee at breakfast, the mince pie the other night—with company present, too! She was right about it, of course, but still. . . .

That trip to Atlantic City that he had set his heart on—she wouldn't let him "afford it," whether he could or not; she had shut down on theatre-going for the same reason. This dancing now—and that was harmless enough!—she was more set against than anything else. The more he couldn't work the more inflexibly she bound him within the narrow round. Yet when Tips did give in to pleasure-seeking she did it so delightfully and whole-heartedly, she enjoyed it herself so much, that it sharpened the disappointment when she refused—for his good! Well, even take it

that he *had* depended too much on her not letting him "slump," there was reason in all things. Couldn't she see? No, she couldn't. Why, why, why? . . . And every sign of an idea gone from him!

Through the cloud of smoke he was puffing, the imposing façade of the Moorish villa on the paper before him showed as damningly commonplace as a row of two-family houses.

"Hello, Sterling! The boy said I could come in." Billy looked up from his desk in the office the next day to see Mr. Atterbury advancing into the room, and jumped to his feet.

"Yes, indeed! I'm awfully glad to see you."

"And how are the plans coming on?"

"Oh, pretty fairly."

"I showed Mrs. Atterbury that sketch of the lower floor, but it wasn't quite her idea," proceeded Mr. Atterbury thoughtfully, seating himself in the chair Billy had placed for him, where he could look over the tops of intervening buildings to the craft plying up and down the river.

Mr. Atterbury was a tall, spare man with slightly grayish-black hair and moustache, a lined, sallow face, a humorous mouth, and clear, observant gray eyes; he had the impalpable look and air of one who had lived much in the tropics—one instinctively visualized him in white linen and a Panama hat sitting under a palm tree; there was a curious sense of power and virility about him—as a man who, while still young, had achieved success from difficulties—that was subtly inspiring.

"Of course," went on the visitor, with his kindly, humorous smile, his keen eyes bent on the face of the other, "she doesn't know just what her idea is, but she says she'll know it when she sees it. Come up to the Venetia with me now and have a cup of tea with her and a little dance afterward!"

"I'm afraid it's too early for me to leave," said Billy doubtfully.

"Oh, not a bit! You dance, don't you?"

"After a fashion."

"Come on, then; it'll do you good. Besides, my wife wants to talk to you."

"Well, all right," said Billy, with sudden alacrity; it was bad policy to say No to the invitation of a wealthy client.

He had a sense of exhilaration as he rolled off in the big motor with Mr. Atterbury, pleasantly intensified by the warmth of Mrs. Atterbury's greetings in the charmingly lighted and decorated grill-room of the Venetia, as she sat, with a laughing, fashionably appareled group at one of the tea-tables that skirted the space for dancing. Mrs. Atterbury was beautifully dressed in some thinnish black material, with a black, transparent-brimmed hat. She was a rather large, soft, dark, pillow-like woman, with a soft, dimpled face and large dimple-elbowed arms in their net sleeves; her voice was deep and rich—there was something essentially feminine and dependent about her that attracted one.

Billy found himself being introduced to a Mr. and Mrs. Breeze, the latter very handsome and

the former very homely; a Mr. and Mrs. Canton, who looked singularly alike in being small, bright-eyed, and pale; and a charming, boyish little Mrs. Gayle.

“This is the Mr. Sterling who is making the lovely plans for our new house,” said Mrs. Atterbury. “I’m so glad you brought him with you, John! Now you mustn’t take too long over your tea, with that music going on. What do you think? Anna Breeze has nearly had a photo-play accepted; she expects to hear definitely from the Bumheimer Film Company to-morrow.”

“That’s fine,” said Mr. Atterbury.

“I sent three scenarios to the Highbrow Performers on Monday,” chimed in Mrs. Canton eagerly. “I think of new ones all the time.”

It appeared that Mr. Canton, the season being bad for the portrait painters’ art, was also thinking of throwing off a “movie” or two on his own account. Mr. Breeze, who “wrote,” narrated an excessively funny plot for one, that set everybody laughing, and little Mrs. Gayle, emboldened, confessed amid suppressed cheers to a real offer for a film-production based on her last novel; but Hoskyns, who was her husband and tended to her business for her, said it wasn’t large enough to accept. Mrs. Atterbury announced for her own husband’s benefit that she had an Idea herself, and he cheerfully observed that a woman never got through surprising you. Even if no one had accomplished anything very great in the moving-picture-play line, everyone’s brains seemed

to be alertly stirring in some way with inspiring accomplishment.

If Billy had hoped for a dance with lovely Mrs. Breeze—who, to his astonishment, he found had a daughter of sixteen, also writing a photo-play—one turn with Mrs. Atterbury dispelled his disappointment. In spite of her size she was as light as thistle-down, with a rhythm of movement that seemed to make her actually a part of the music and yet subtly dependent on him for guidance.

“Well, you certainly can dance,” he breathed, as he propelled her swayingly down the long room to the strains of the violins.

“Oh, but you do it beautifully,” she murmured in return. “You’re very fond of dancing, aren’t you?”

“Very, but I seldom get a chance at it; my wife doesn’t care for it.”

“Oh, that’s a pity! My husband didn’t care for it either at first—he thought it a waste of time; but now he feels differently; he says it freshens him up wonderfully; the exercise is so good for him and it changes the current of his thought as nothing else does.”

“It certainly does that,” said Billy joyously. “Oh, don’t stop—not yet! Dance everything with me!”

“But the music is stopping now,” she laughed. “Besides, you must ask Mrs. Gayle next.”

Some more people joined the group. The joy and lightness of the music and the dance seemed to set the blood running more swiftly in his veins. Mrs. Gayle was almost as good a partner as Mrs. Atterbury; and Mrs. Breeze . . .

The only thing was that it was over all too soon. Mr. Atterbury, looking at his watch, discovered that they had to catch a train at once for home; the party dissolved suddenly with hurried farewells and the parting injunction to Billy to meet them there at the same time on Monday. There had been no talk with Mrs. Atterbury over the plans, after all, and yet. . . .

He was walking home, with the lilt and fervour of the music still in his pulse, entering the apartment eager to pour out the whole occurrence to Tips, who came to meet him, very pretty in the little white gown.

"Well, you look as if you had been having a good time!" she said as he kissed her. "What have you been doing?"

"I've been dancing at the Venetia."

"Dancing!" She stiffened.

"Yes." He passed his hand through his upstanding hair as he faced her, his brilliant dark eyes still rapt. "Mr. Atterbury took me up there with him this afternoon. I couldn't refuse. Mrs. Atterbury was there, with an awfully interesting crowd, people who are all doing things. The dancing was fine."

"Oh!" Tips looked at him with an expression which he dimly perceived beyond some radiant and absorbing vision of his own. He went on gabbling.

"I've promised to meet them there again on Monday. You'd better come, too; you'd like it."

She put her hand on his arm in the familiar attitude. "Did you get any work done to-day, Billy?"

"Well, I didn't do very much, but There was a little Mrs. Gayle there, who——"

"I think I'd rather not hear about it now, dear."

Tips's voice was gentle but firm. "Of course I realize that you couldn't refuse Mr. Atterbury, but—— It's just as I knew it would be, dear, if you gave way to this dancing craze at all—and now, when most people have got over it, you'll think of nothing else. I can't help it, of course,—if you will do it, but—— You'd better go in at once, and kiss the children good-night."

"Very well," said Billy absently, stepping into the white-robed room to perform that parental duty to the two chubby little boys of three and four who, with clean rosy cheeks, smoothly brushed hair of Tips's own ruddy hue—Tips used to be as rosy and as gay!—struggled with bare toes out of the tucked-in covers to climb up on Daddy's neck. Their enthusiasm seemed delightfully to match his own. Two children were supposed to be almost too large a family for a flat; one, preferably a girl, was the decent limit. The Gatches, on the lower floor, who had three under five years of age, were considered to be almost immoral.

Billy, with a fat little boy on either shoulder, pranced gaily around the room in a fox-trot to the accompaniment of shrieks of delight, until warned by his wife's anxious voice.

"Billy, I hate to stop the fun, but I'm afraid they won't get to sleep for hours."

Even without encouragement he couldn't help at

dinner talking over some of the incidents of the afternoon, in the intervals of that household converse suggesting a diminishing balance in the bank. Afterward he sat down in the living room with a book and a certain quiet dignity of manner that seemed to preclude interruption. There are times when even a man the most defenceless to domestic attack, gives that silent masculine warning that he is to be let alone. He was consciously banking down the fire within him until he was ready to let it blaze up. Once or twice he saw his wife's eyes stray anxiously toward the other room, with a droop of the lines around her mouth, but he knew too much to risk an abortive attempt at expression in these surroundings. If he let himself be jarred off the right track now—then indeed, *Good-night!* That dance music, impudent, yearning, barbaric—the exhilarating exercise—seemed to have given a fillip to the machinery of the brain. The waves of sound took form in lines—in the graceful lightness of pillars, and a wonderfully sequent proportion. Proportion! That was what his plan had lacked—that proportion that is the mark of genius; a joy both to the eye and to the spirit. When he got to work to-morrow . . .

“Poor little girl, she's had a stupid evening!” he said.

“Oh, I don't mind that, dear,” she replied heroically, as she turned away. “*Only*—”

He didn't follow her as he was meant to, to ask for the rest of the sentence. If she resolutely refused to let him bask in the sunshine of approval that his soul

loved—and she was hurting herself, mind you, just as much by not giving it—why, he didn't care whether he basked or not; only—there it came again! Of course he did.

The portals of the Moorish-American villa opened to him next day, and for it and for many days after he put in that hard and immeasurably painstaking work which Inspiration makes possible to those whom she singles out; and he not only went up for the dancing at the Venetia on Monday, but on the Friday also, and a couple of times the next week and the week after. The second time he had suggested Tips going, to receive the expected refusal, with the additional statement that she didn't have anything to wear, anyway.

He seemed to get a peculiar and intimate reinforcement from the meetings with the "crowd"; ideas sprung in him that he had never dreamed of before; the paucity of invention had given way to a wealth of possible material that he was desperately eager to work out. He was modest about claiming any genius, but sometimes revelations . . .

Mr. Atterbury was delighted with the new plan of the villa, and showed his delight.

"I don't know what you've done to the thing, Sterling—I can tell you now that I was disappointed at first, but you seem to have caught just the idea; even I, with my limited understanding, can see that it is beautiful. You'll be the rage before you know it, and I tell you this recreation is doing you good. You look like a new man. Agnes was quite worried

about you when I first brought you up; she goes around bragging about you now."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Mrs. Atterbury.

There was of course that knowledge of the time when this work should be completed, far off though that might be; there was always that chasm looming ahead to keep one from being too cocksure yet of any future.

It was impossible not to see a change of attitude in the whole party toward him, frankly welcoming him as one of them. Mr. Breeze still waited for any reply from the Bumheimer Film Company, but Mrs. Canton had had such a nice letter from the Highbrow Performers, in returning her plays, that it quite inspired one to writing more! Mr. Canton had been working too hard on a providentially ordered portrait to do much in the movie line; but little Mrs. Gayle had had one accepted after another, and was boyishly pleased and shining-eyed.

Nobody could help liking Billy; he had a genuine lightness and sweetness of disposition that makes friends. The dancing was more and more of a joy to him, but he always came back to Mrs. Atterbury for a partner; her perfect dancing gave the real touch to the afternoon—she was so large and soft, and sweet and understanding, she made a certain quality of home.

The quality of home! During all these days of accomplishment, the fatigue and satisfaction of it, that was what Billy missed.

Tips was gentle, she was sweet, she was protective;

but even when she was most loving, she herself, somehow, wasn't there. He told her religiously each time he went to the Venetia and, at first, as much of the happenings there as he could nerve himself to offer up in the face of her acquiescent non-interest. Billy liked to talk, to pour out everything to Tips for her counted-on sympathy and comment. He had that accustomed desire to be approved of, to be subtly made to feel that he was the nicest thing that ever happened. If Tips was indifferent it strangely took something out of his life that even success couldn't bring to him. Sometimes he found her looking at him oddly in those evenings in which he didn't work any more at home, when, with a feeling that she was waiting for him to say something—he would be hanged if he knew what!—a mystery seemed to hang around her. As far as he could make it out, she spent her days, when not taking care of the children, in incessantly sewing—dressmaking. It annoyed him; he resented, amid all the pleasure at the Venetia, being put, even tacitly, by others in the category of the maritally disaffected. Once, at first, Mrs. Atterbury had asked him to bring his wife, and his short, "Thank you, she doesn't dance," had, he felt, given a false impression. He had refused an invitation to dine at the Cantons' and at Mrs. Gayle's.

He loved his wife; they had been the dearest companions—and more, how much more! Why, Tips—Tips! It hurt him now to see her suffer. Why should she suffer? He was doing everything in the world he could for her. Why under heaven need she

be so aloof, so repressed, so indifferent, so steadily disapproving where there was nothing to disapprove of? He knew, if she wouldn't, what success was in his grasp. There wasn't a woman there who could compare to him with his wife. As for the dancing afternoons, he had been feeling gradually that his attendance on them hung by the slightest tenure. Oh, well!

There are undoubtedly organizations which are supersensitive to those well-known shadows of coming events. Billy, joyously entering the grill-room of the Venetia with Mr. Atterbury, was conscious suddenly of some faint dissatisfaction haunting him; he couldn't tell with what, or why. On analysis, there was nothing to cause it. The work was going on all right; the little boys were well; Tips had shown a certain softness, a tender friendliness toward him when he left that morning, laying her cheek against his in a little fleeting caress in addition to the official farewell, to which he was quick to respond, saying impulsively: "Why don't you come with me this afternoon, Tips? You're missing something," and accepting without comment her terse reply that she was due at a committee meeting.

He had felt masterful, alert, all day, capable of controlling fate; yet from the minute he had entered the familiar precincts of the grill something unpleasant seemed to be at the back of his mind, pulling at him through all the delightful swing of the dance with Mrs Atterbury.

Mrs. Gayle had had another big success and was

being congratulated, responding with the warm grip of her little hand. Mr. Breeze had written a small poem that had appeared in the *Acropolis*. Though no one ever bought the *Acropolis* other than those thus interested, it was nice to know that the poem was in print. Mrs. Breeze, her beautiful face upraised to Billy's in the swing of the dance as they went back and forth through the long room, had other matters to speak of.

"I don't know whether Mrs. Atterbury has told you, Mr. Sterling, but Peter and I want you to build our modest little bungalow on the shore. We think your plans for the Moorish villa are wonderful—not that we want anything Moorish, or so expensive, but your ideas are so original, as well as beautiful. Please don't say you'll be so busy seeing to the building of the Atterburys' house that you can't undertake ours. Peter said I could speak to you first."

"Why, I think I can undertake it," said Billy, with laudable composure; for a moment that leaden sensation lifted as he piloted deftly, past a table filled only with women, through the dancing throng.

"Mrs. Gayle is talking about getting you to build her French château for her. She's making money hand over fist; that, of course, will be something really big, so I thought we'd better get our little shack in now," went on Mrs. Breeze.

Billy gasped. Mrs. Gayle, too! A queer, chilly current seemed to be going through him. Atterbury's words: "You'll be the rage before you know it, Sterling," returned to him. He saw that chasm—ever

terrifyingly ahead of him no matter what the security of the hour—permanently closed by this bridge to Fortune. The excitement of the prospect would have dizzied him but for the quickly steadyng knowledge that no matter what the opportunity, the accomplishment would have to be his work. Thank God, he knew now that he had it in him to “make good.”

“It is awfully kind of you, Mrs. Breeze,” he said warmly.

“Well, you know we all like you so much, Mr. Sterling. Peter and I feel it is going to give us great pleasure to have you associated with our house,” said Mrs. Breeze. “Tell me, do you know that lovely girl over there—the one with the copper-coloured hair, in black and white, with the little green feather in her hat, sitting at that table full of club-women? She’s had her eyes fixed on you all the time.”

Billy gasped once more; the earth seemed to rock. There sat Tips, indeed. How long had she been there? But he only said quickly: “Ah, I’ll have the pleasure of bringing her over to meet you, if I may. You see, that’s my wife.”

He went over to her at once, when he had taken his partner to a seat; and they stood talking together a minute before she walked across the room with him in the interlude of the dance, her little patent-leather shoes, correctly light spatted, showing under her short skirt, to be welcomed by the group, while Billy surveyed her covertly.

Tips looked extraordinarily charming, there could be no question of that; she who had said she had noth-

ing to wear! Why, there wasn't a woman in the room more modishly and becomingly gowned; her blue eyes sparkled, her replies were just what they should have been, she responded delightfully to the intimacy of the others—"who knew her husband so well." She beamed nicely upon him. Billy was proud of her! And yet—and yet— It was plain that the men all admired her; the women, Mrs. Atterbury especially, seemed to like her as well; Tips certainly was making an impression! Yet as far as he himself was concerned, if she had been illusive before, he knew that she was on the other side of the world now. She refused to dance, on the score of having to go back soon to her party.

"Mr. Sterling must certainly bring you after this," said Agnes Atterbury warmly. "We are all so proud to know him."

"That is very sweet of you," said Tips.

"Really, dancing with him has spoiled me for dancing with any one else," said Mrs. Breeze. "He leads wonderfully."

"He's so clever, he always gives you new ideas," chimed in little Mrs. Gayle gratefully, in her deep, boyish voice. "I went home last Friday, after that heavenly one-step, and wrote on my new play until four o'clock in the morning. Hoskyns—my husband—sat by me, stacking up the sheets from the typewriter and giving me coffee. It's the best work I've done yet."

"I'm so glad," said Tips cordially, with her pretty manner. Her hand rested lightly on Billy's arm in

the familiar attitude; he shivered mentally under her touch. Mr. Canton was asking, interestedly, if Tips had had her portrait painted.

She went back to her party under Billy's escort after prettily made adieu.

The rest of the hour passed as in a dream—a bad dream. Tips left before he did, but she left her presence behind her! He tried to talk and laugh as before; he seemed to carry it off all right. Oddly enough, Tips's advent had appeared to add to his prestige; everyone voted her charming.

Why should she be like that to him?—why should she resent his being there? Only Mrs. Atterbury looked at him with a new expression, kind but wondering. He felt that she really liked Tips. He delayed going home as long as he could, in view of the scene that would occur when he got there. He knew fatally well his dancing days were numbered; that a scene there had to be—knew, while he rebelled at it. Why, why all this unnecessary bother about what might be so agreeable? Why always take the superior air and call him to account?

He tried to rally his fearful heart with the thought that perhaps there wouldn't be any scene at all; perhaps he had only imagined her resentment—perhaps she would just say, "Hello, Billy!" when he got in; "Hello, Billy," cheerfully, just like that. "I'm glad to meet your crowd! I'd no idea they were so nice." Wouldn't that be the joyous thing! He imagined himself expanding delightfully under this glow. But he knew—oh, fatally well—that

she would say nothing of the kind. Tips, the amiable and gentle, had the hard, tenacious, and unyielding quality of the amiable and gentle. In those few times—really few—in which she had shown this streak, he had felt a strange, unmentionable resentment at being so judged, and a lessening of the bond between them.

There were ways in which you couldn't stand out against a woman—you had to give in, no matter how you revolted at the job. Oh, heavens, he didn't want to go in for this sort of thing now; he didn't *want* to; he couldn't afford to lessen his working inspiration in any such way! Well, he had to face the music, that was all there was about it. He would find her face down upon the bed weeping convulsively, or sitting in a chair, rigid, her eyes staring before her, refusing to speak—he would sit down by her, and then—oh, then—she would begin to speak; she always took the higher plane. Well, she had a right to; he would own up—and own up some more—and then some, as the phrase goes; just so much would have to be gone through before life could flow on normally again. The doctor had said once that Tips wasn't very strong, that she couldn't stand much. The thought had lashed Billy into the traces more than once. Well, if he had to knuckle down, he had to, that was all there was about it; promise never to go to any more dances, let her decide what was best for him for ever and ever and ever.

He put his key into the lock and opened the door into the long, narrow passage of the apartment. Of

course Tips didn't come to meet him, yet he had half hoped that she would! Everything seemed unusually silent. Yes, Minna was in the kitchen all right; he saw her as he passed the little boys asleep in their cribs. There was a light in the bedroom and living rooms, but Tips wasn't there. He called her softly, but there was no answer.

A slight rustling in the bedroom caught his attention. He stepped softly in—Tips evidently was in the closet. She emerged from the closet, hurling some clothes into an open trunk which he now perceived standing on the floor. As she emerged, he looked at her in wonder. Was this the pale and repressed girl of the last month? Tips was a blaze of colour; her little figure was swathed in a turquoise kimono half dragged from a small milk-white shoulder, her ruddy hair was tumbled down, her cheeks flamed scarlet, her white teeth gleamed between parted red lips, her eyes—no tears there!—radiated blue fire; her small fist clenched involuntarily as he came toward her, her breast heaved. Never since the first days of their marriage had she looked so little and childish and beautiful.

“Hel-lo!” he said gently. “What have we here?”

She gave him a wild glance as he put his arms around her, looking from side to side, as if for escape. She spoke pantingly:

“I'm going away from you—now, to-night! I'll never live with you again! I'll take the boys with me, and—go—home—to Father.”

“But why on earth——”

"I—that girl you were dancing with—you never told me of her. I hated her so! I felt so strange." She struggled suddenly like a wild thing to free herself from his grasp, beating him frantically with her two small fists. "Let me be!"

"Hello!" said Billy again, in masculine amaze, with a sudden silent thrill of laughter. "My, my, my! What a little spitfire we are getting to be! No, I'm not going to let your hands go—you're too dangerous; you might injure me for life, and then how would you feel? Listen, there isn't any girl in the case! Do you hear me? That's Mrs. Breeze. She's as crazy over her own husband as you are over me. Be still now! She's got a daughter nearly seventeen—take that in. She can't come a candle for looks to a little thing I know—mother of two boys of mine. What? Speak a little louder, dear, I can't hear you!"

"You," she panted with the words fiercely—"you never asked me to come with you to—the dances——"

"Never asked you! Come, I like that. I——"

"Yes, you said, 'Don't you want to come along, Tips? You're missing something.' Just like that you said it; and I've been sewing and planning and sewing, making over that suit so that I could have something—and—I saved my hat out of the—the—butter and eggs, so that I could look decent to go and dance with you; and all—you said was, 'Don't you want to come along—Tips?' When I longed to be with you so, when I was just waiting and waiting for you to say you wanted me! I'm sick and tired

of being a make-weight. I want—I want—I want—” her voice rose uncontrollably—“to en—joy myself, too!”

“And so you shall,” said Billy tenderly. “Why, I’ve been missing you all the time, dearest, more than I could tell you.” This was not the judge he had dreaded, but a poor little wild, hurt thing, quivering under his hand, yet flying to him for succour. He sat down on a chair behind him, drawing her on his knee; her arms flung suddenly around his neck. This was the time for all the little words that only lovers know. . . .

“And do you take it in,” he announced after a while, “that we’re going to be rich and great? You won’t have to economize much longer. Atterbury gives me a cheque to-morrow and I’m to build for Mrs. Gayle, and for that poor Mrs. Breeze you were so furious at, you bad child.”

“And you’ve done it all without me?”

“No, no, not a bit of it,” he averred anxiously. “Now, smile—aren’t you going to smile *ever* again? Never mind if there isn’t anything to laugh at; smile at *me*! I’m the joke! There, that’s better.” He stood up, still with his arms around her.

From the floor below the music of a phonograph fox-trot came wafted up the shaft. Unconsciously they stepped lightly off to it, together, between the bed and trunk and the dressing table.

“Why, you dance like a bird, Tips!” he said joyously. “Let’s go out to-night and have a lark!”

CLYTIE COMES BACK

IT WAS February, the before-dawn of the year, when vitality is at its lowest and the problems of existence seem as if they could never be solved; when even in the most loving households there are sagging times when there seems no real uplift obtainable, and that Heaven-sent, saving angel, a sense of humour, sits humped together on the doorstep with folded wings, unable to enter.

To-night, like the reverberation of a wheel after the impetus has been removed, the stress and habit of the long business day still clung to Joseph Langshaw in a certain tenseness of manner. He hardly spoke at the table to little glowing dark-eyed Mary, except to reprove her, though gently, for spilling the usual glass of water, and to enjoin the chubby George—not so gently—to use his handkerchief. He listened with evident effort to the history of the day as told him, with a languid attempt at her usual vivacity, by his wife, who nervously took note of him, the colour coming momentarily into the too-pale cheeks. Once or twice he shifted his eyes toward her without any answering gleam in them, and shifted them quickly away again.

The dinner, at which the cheap and unexciting carrot flanked a pallid stew, and the dessert was some-

thing thin which ought to have been thick, failed to bring him back in spirit. Afterward he strolled off by himself. Clytie could hear him aimlessly walking around up above, opening and shutting bureau drawers, and pulling shades testingly up and down on their spring rollers. Once he called down, questioning her as to the whereabouts of a caster that nobody had seen since summer before last. When the interlude of kissing the children good-night in their tucked-in beds was over he came downstairs to the little library once more, dropped into a chair by the lamp, and taking up a book of George's that had once been his own, became apparently deeply immersed in it. His wife had been sitting by him for some time, her work dropped in her lap, her slight figure drooping, and her small, dark-curled head resting languidly in her too-thin arm, before he seemed to notice her, and closing the dilapidated red covers of the "Cornet of Horse," laid it resolutely on the table beside him.

"How have you felt to-day?" he asked.

"Oh, pretty well. I'm just a little tired now, that's all. Of course after diphtheria—— And the children had to have so many things done for them, I didn't get much chance to rest this afternoon, though I meant to."

"Been sweeping any?"

"No. Oh, well, I just gave a touch to the nursery. The house gets in such a perfect state and Minna was so long in coming upstairs—but that was nothing." Her tone changed. "That dinner was so dreadful to-night you couldn't eat a thing. I'll see about it

myself to-morrow. I've been so bothered, everything costs so much, and I don't like to ask you for any more money when I know we're running behind." Clytie's eyelashes began to wink; her red lip trembled. "You see I haven't been able to go out and buy things myself as I used to, and——"

"Oh, I wouldn't let a little thing like that bother me," said her husband carelessly, rising and humming a tune as he walked over to the mantelpiece, taking up a vase that had stood there for only thirteen years and examining it critically. He hummed very badly, and, as Clytie knew, only when he was perturbed. She watched him now until he came over to her.

"See here, Clytie," he said abruptly, "this sort of thing has got to be stopped. Everyone has been telling me how badly you're looking and that you ought to have a change. Even that old goat Rutter—Rutter!—was speaking of it coming out on the train to-night; said his wife thought perhaps I didn't notice it—the fool! Of course I told him you were never better in your life. Thank Heaven, I can manage my own family affairs without the help of the neighbourhood!" His voice grew stormier. "But this sort of thing has got to be stopped, that's all there is about it. You wear yourself out for the house and the children. Let the children wait on themselves! Let the house go! Here I come home myself after a hard day's work and find that you've been sweeping, after what Doctor Coulter told you! You're not to touch a broom, do you hear? And as for the meals, you know perfectly well I don't care

what I eat. Let Minna attend to them; that's what she's paid for. I tell you, if I once get after her she'll learn to cook in short order." He paused before giving vent to the man's shibboleth: "If I were to run my business like this I——"

"Hark, there's Baby!" exclaimed Clytie anxiously, starting up.

"Sit down. I'll go up to her," said the husband resignedly. "She's got to quit this habit of waking every evening."

He tramped firmly up the stairs, but presently came down again with the three-year-old child, a plump, blanketed bundle, in his arms, her yellow hair straggling against his coat sleeve and her round, blue eyes regally content.

"Her feet were cold," he announced in excuse, displaying those members to the doubtful warmth of the smouldering logs on the hearth. There was something in that round little form that still held a glint of Heaven in it to the father's heart. Unnecessary as it was for Baby to hold up an evening in this way, the touch of her mysteriously lightened care.

"When does Mr. Wilkinson go back to California?" asked Clytie suddenly, after a few moments of a peaceful silence.

"Next week."

"And how are the business plans coming out with that Mr. Henkel he introduced you to?"

"Oh, the plans are all right," said Langshaw grimly. "I am the one that's hanging fire. I was to have charge of the office end of it, but you see I can't

furnish the man Henkel wants for the other part of the job. It must be someone who can put in a little capital—they're letting me in without any—someone who has a technical knowledge of the machine, and is thoroughly familiar with the ground to be worked over. Sounds simple, but I'll be hanged if it is!"

"How about Mr. Ballard?"

"He can't raise the money."

"Mr. Francis?"

"He drinks. I've been searching my brain night and day. I've written letters to a few people, but they won't do any good. I can't take the time to look around. Henkel has been mighty nice about it—he doesn't know anybody here himself—but he can't wait for me much longer. He sails for Europe on the fifteenth, and he's got to get things settled before he goes; he's only giving me this chance because he's under obligation to Wilkinson. Dear old man! I fancy everybody's under some obligation to him. Green, from Philadelphia, will come on and take charge of things if I can't."

"Wouldn't it be possible for you to go in with him?"

Langshaw shook his head. "No, he has his own people."

"How much salary did they offer you?" asked Clytie timidly. "You didn't tell me."

"Five thousand."

There was an awed pause. Perhaps at no possible height of future prosperity could any sum look so

large to the two concerned as that five thousand dollars.

The next moment Langshaw's tone changed to one of intense irritation as he bent over to prod the smoking logs: "Why under Heaven can we never get wood that burns? Don't order any more from Boggs. What on earth are you crying for?"

"I've tried so hard to get the right kind of wood. I s-s-sent word to Boggs twice about it—he sends that horrid cross-eyed man to take the order. And I know you have too much on your mind! I know it all the time, and I only want to help you and I can't seem to! You have to work so hard in the office for—for—that horrid firm, and George ought to be taken to the dentist, and you need a pair of new shoes yourself this minute, and I—I love you—I love you s-s-so much——"

Langshaw controlled himself with an effort so great that it jarred him all over. The angel of the sense of humour ascended to the roof and perched there in a dejected heap. "If you keep on like this you'll make yourself ill, Clytie," he said firmly, though he didn't deny her the comfort of his dear hand as she sobbed on his shoulder over the bundled form of Baby, whose eyes in the midst of turmoil had closed. "What you need is a change—and money or rest; and in some way or another, by George, you've got to have it!"

II

MRS. LANGSHAW had been away only a couple of times from her family in years gone by, short

absences demanded by the illness of others, from which she had returned with all the swiftness of a homing bird. On various occasions since, the need of change had been urged for her, with always the same result—there was nowhere to go. Most of their intimate friends were in the place; relatives were inadequately situated as regards visitors; there was no money for resorts.

But when Langshaw came home the next night, somewhat earlier than usual, his brooding, tired, harassed eyes had a tender, superficial gleam in them; a smile curved the worn lines around his mouth as he announced:

“What do you think, children? Little Mother’s got an invitation to go out to Los Angeles!”

“Where is Los Angeles?” asked Mary, climbing up on his knee, while the sturdy George, one rubber boot drawn off to expose a sodden stocking, paused arrested on the hearthrug.

“It’s out in California, three thousand miles away; think of that!” answered the father. He went on quickly:

“It’s all Wilkinson’s doing, Clytie; dear old man! I was talking to him this morning about you, and the first thing I knew he was offering to take you out with him next week on his pass. He says it won’t cost you a cent. He said his wife would be overjoyed to see any one from home, and the climate will fix you up as nothing else would. He just sat down and told me of some of the hard times he and his wife went through when they were young. Once she was sick,

and he took her forty miles on muleback through the mountains. That cured her up. I tell you he's one of the finest old fellows you could find."

"But I don't know Mrs. Wilkinson," objected Clytie, in dismay, her colour coming and going ominously.

Langshaw waved his hand: "That's all settled. Wilkinson said himself that of course a woman would want an invitation from another woman, and he telegraphed details to his wife while I was there, for fear he might forget it later, he's so absent-minded. You'll get a night letter from her to-morrow morning. They live in a sort of palace, I judge, in Los Angeles, and they've any number of motors. He says his wife loves to have young people around her. Just the thing to do you worlds of good! Just imagine—you'll see the Rockies and the Grand Canyon! Wilkinson will be coming back in six weeks and he'll bring you with him then."

"Six weeks!" Clytie gasped. Her dark eyes grew larger; her small figure vibrated. "Joe Langshaw! I couldn't stay away for six weeks without you and the children—I couldn't! There's no use telling me to, I won't; I——" She stopped weakly, under the force of his gaze, and buried her face in her hands.

"See here, Clytie, who's doing this?" said her husband masterfully. "You're going. I'm running this household now, and you're going to get well if I know it, dear. There, you cry for everything—that shows what a condition you're in. Will it do the children or me any good to have you stay home

and die? Answer me that! Well, I should think not. You're going to come back so well and young and beautiful that I'll fall in love with you all over again. George, use your handkerchief or leave the room."

"You need a change more than I do," flashed Clytie, but perhaps his last words touched a faintly vibrating chord. In all brave and healthful natures there is a natural ardour of travel. Anticipation of the unusual waved, even if but for the moment, its wizard wand. The Rockies loomed largely in the conversation at dinner, while George and Mary clamoured loudly to go, too. Clytie's eyes followed her husband as if light dwelt in his presence. She couldn't have told that the idea of being sent away from him made her feel foolishly frightened, like a child being pushed off into the dark. But of course you would forget all that when you saw the Rockies.

That evening when they were alone they talked out everything exhaustively. Langshaw's mother would come and stay with the children, whom she adored. Langshaw loved to boss his mother, and she loved to be bossed by him. He wrote the letter at once and ran out and posted it.

As for a week being a short time in which to make one's preparations for a trip to California, a person could get ready for an absence of years in a day. For himself a half hour would suffice. Was money needed for the replenishment of her wardrobe, even though she at least had her best gown and a walking suit? Money would be forthcoming for what was

necessary. If she couldn't go to town he would purchase for her.

They pored over timetables, looking up not only the train on which she would go but the one on which she would return, settling that Langshaw would leave the office to come up and meet her. In the midst of all this earnest consultation there were intermediate moments in which little Mary twice woke up for a drink of water, and Baby had to be covered, the furnace raked down, and the sturdy George, coughing croupily, given cough medicine, the first dose of which administered by Clytie's shaking hand delayingly, went outside his throat instead of in it, and necessitated the protested ignominy of a large bath towel stuffed inside his nightgear. Yet still the two talked on, engrossed, as they made ready for the night; only really coming back to the present just as they were ready, at a quarter of twelve, to turn out the light, by discovering that Minna, due in the house by half-past ten, hadn't come in yet. That furious, nerve-racking anger consequent on sitting up for a delinquent maid took possession of the spirit.

"By George, if she does this while you're away I'll send her kiting; that's all there is about it!" breathed Langshaw between his teeth.

"But, Joe, you couldn't, with the children and everything."

"I wouldn't let a little thing like that faze me," said Langshaw grandly. He was at the moment the embodiment of man, the dominant power, before whose gleaming axe strong forests crash down upon

the sward. Minna's step was heard on the porch below.

"How did that business with Mr. Henkel get on to-day?" asked Clytie in a small voice, the last thing.

"All right!" answered her husband, in a final tone of such emphasis that any but a very stupid woman—and little, loving Clytie was never that—couldn't help knowing that it was all wrong, and she mustn't ask any more questions.

Langshaw felt that if he could only hold things together with Henkel until his wife got safely off, he could force all the powers of his freed mind to a satisfactory settlement of the situation in the days remaining to him, before the Philadelphia people would be called in. When Clytie got off he could see to everything.

III

THE next week was, to the reminiscent mind, a crowded period of deadly earnestness and heroic strivings to accomplish the simplest, the most inane things. Clytie herself visibly wilted under the strain. Every time Langshaw looked at her, her unnaturally large eyes and translucent pallor goaded him to fresh effort in her behalf.

The first hitch came in a letter from his mother, tearfully announcing that she felt that she ought not to leave his sister Ella, who was in one of her nervous states at present; though her dearest boy knew how much, how very much, she longed to be with him and the darling children. Had Clytie tried eating apples?

They were said to be very strengthening. Langshaw dropped the letter before he got to the end.

"Poor Mother!" he said, with a little grimace; "she always thinks that if she really wants to do a thing it must be wrong."

"Oh, she always sacrifices you to that selfish Ella," said Clytie, with sudden fierceness. After all Joe had done for his mother! "Well, of course I won't go now."

"Oh, yes, you will," said Langshaw firmly.

Cousin Helen, who had been a trained nurse and had made their house her headquarters whenever she came to town, was confidently called upon. In her keeping the children's health would be safeguarded. But Cousin Helen also Biblically prayed to be excused. She would love so much to help them out, but she was to receive at a tea on the following Monday, and the week after that she had engaged the dressmaker by the day. If Clytie could wait until March—

That letter went in the waste basket.

"Well, as far as I can see there's nothing but to get Mrs. Mulger," said Langshaw grimly.

"Oh, Joe dearest! But you never could stand her for six weeks! Of course the children adore Mulgy, and it would help her out, but—— Joe, please let me stay home! You would be perfectly miserable with Mrs. Mulger. If you knew how I didn't want to go—Joe, please!"

"If you cry you'll make yourself ill;" he repeated the monotonous warning. "Mrs. Mulger isn't going

to make any difference to me, I can tell you that."

Yet even he couldn't help wincing in secret at the prospect. Mrs. Mulger was a remarkably homely woman in reduced circumstances—of elephantine proportions and a fawnlike timidity in the presence of man. She jumped when Langshaw spoke to her at the table; she scuttled out of his way impedingly when she met him on the stairs; she required with every breath the assurance that she wasn't annoying him. She engendered in Langshaw unsuspected sympathies with Nero.

But it proved that Mrs. Mulger could come.

Mr. Wilkinson, white-bearded, with his kind blue eyes and comforting air of all's well, dined with them one hurried evening; but apart from that the days were filled with that incredible sense of rush and seriousness of preparation, and with increasing small, wrenching expenditures.

Langshaw himself, taking precious time, shopped with his wife's illegible pencilled lists, earnestly purchasing from white-goods counters—usually outside the masculine province—with the expert help of salesladies, who were comfortingly sure his wife would like the articles; he had a dim impression that she didn't like those violently ribboned things. He bought stockings for her little feet—dear, dearest little feet, that used to dance so lightly! Once he suddenly choked at the thought of them. He bought her a blue felt hat with a red bow; he matched samples; but on one point he stood firm—

he couldn't be brought to changing things. He haled the unwilling George and Mary to the dentist, at Clytie's anguished behest, on his precious Saturday afternoon; he listened morning and evening to increasing details as to what was to be put in the wash during her absence, and how many silver spoons there were to count, and what the children ought not to eat, and what was to be done under those hypothetical conditions that never happen. Every night when he came home—he had taken to walking with a slow, padding, panther-like step, as one who treads a jungle—he found the house full of loudly departing women, who had been helping Clytie with her wardrobe, and had each a moment of lowered, confidential speech with him to say how badly Clytie was looking and that he was getting her off just in time.

The children were underfoot everywhere. He had only one safety valve, in a letter which he wrote to a contractor who had mistakenly dumped a barrow-load of manure on his front walk. That letter was a masterpiece of stinging satire, of Jove-like invective, and of delicately insulting epigram. It was never sent, because he found on rising the next morning that the manure had been removed, but it had already filled its appointed place in the scheme of the universe. Langshaw had relieved his soul.

The day came at last, yet with a paralyzing reality, when Clytie stood with little Mary clinging to her, in the open doorway of her house, ready for departure, the blue hat with the scarlet ribbon crowning the dark tendrils of her lovely hair. Though it was

seven o'clock it was still light. She was to be spared the fatigue of the journey to town and through it to the big station. Kind Mr. Wilkinson had sent an automobile for her; her small trunk and her bag were already in it. Langshaw stood ready to help her in as soon as Mrs. Mulger should appear to take charge; the straw-coloured Minna hovered smilingly in the background; neighbours on either side stood on their porches to wave her off cheerily. And at this ultimate moment there was an irritating failure to connect with the perfectly planned.

Mrs. Mulger sent word by a small boy that a visitor had arrived, and she hoped it wouldn't make any difference if she came the next morning instead of to-night.

"Not make any difference! Why, that's what we wanted—to have her here now," wailed Clytie, tearing up the letter wrathfully. "You ask people for your time and they come at theirs! I can't go if Mrs. Mulger isn't here!"

"Oh, yes, you can," said Langshaw, with patient reassurance. "She'll be here in the morning all right, and Minna will look after the children till I get back from the station. Come, say good-bye to little Mary."

"But George—where is George?"

Sure enough, where was George?

"George, George, where are you? George! Come at once and say good-bye to your mother!"

"I can't go without seeing George," sobbed Clytie.

"George! George!"

Hurrying neighbours rushed to search for the missing boy; garden and street resounded with shouts for George.

“Where is George Langshaw? His mother is waiting to say good-bye to him!”

“George Langshaw!” “Georgie!” “I saw him only a moment ago in Bournan’s yard.” “No, he isn’t there.” “Geor-ge Lang-shaw!” “George! George!”

Finally unearthed from somebody’s rear premises, he was haled to the grasp of his father’s hand, grown incredibly muddy since dinner, his yellow locks hanging over an encrusted cheek.

“How in the world did you ever get yourself so filthy? Stand up, sir, and kiss your mother good-bye. What do you mean by running off like this? Go in the house now and stay there till bedtime.”

“Oh, Joe, please don’t be cross to him now—please!”

“No, I won’t—all right; but hurry up,” he admonished her.

George’s round face, masculinely sullen and defiant of emotional scenes, emerged from his mother’s tearful embrace; his coat sleeve rubbed across the place where her lips had been while his eyes winked unwillingly. Perhaps his father had an inner sympathy with George.

Langshaw lifted his wife into the car, stepping in after her, slammed the door, and they sped with little Mary’s sudden piercing shrieks following them:

"I want to go with my mother! . I want to go with my mother! I want to go—to go—to go-o-o—"

The ride was a silent one. They bumped and jarred and whizzed along barren roads, stuck fast in the traffic of streets. Night had come on when, after passing through the rows of lamps, they arrived at the big station and ensconced themselves in the white marble waiting room, with its long vistas, in which it seemed that a mere handful of pygmies were scattered. One of them, however, promptly turned out to be Mr. Wilkinson, white-bearded and bright-eyed, a slouch hat over his white hair and a coloured porter in tow carrying two enormous bags. Mr. Wilkinson had a kind homeliness in his manner that made everything seem natural and usual and for the best every way.

"Well, we're all here in time," he said congratulatorily. "My wife says I'm so absent-minded she's never sure of me unless she sees me! Now, Mrs. Langshaw, this little trip is going to do you a world of good. The only trouble is that your stay will be too short; you know you'll hardly get out there before you'll find yourself at home again."

"How long before the train starts?" Clytie asked.

"The gates won't be open for twenty minutes yet."

"Then I think you'd better go right home, Joe," Clytie implored her husband anxiously. "The children are all alone with Minna. As long as Mr. Wilkinson is here with the tickets perhaps he'll check my trunk, so that you can go right along. I'd rather, really! Please!"

"Very well," said Langshaw.

Their formal leavetaking, to the public eye, was brief; only he and she knew. Then he had left her.

Kind Mr. Wilkinson kept on talking for a few minutes, though Clytie didn't hear what he said, before he also hurried off—the porter with the bags still following him—to see to her luggage. It gave her an unexpectedly lost feeling to be left, even momentarily, alone with only the long cloak lying on the seat beside her and her suitcase to show that she actually belonged anywhere.

The station was very, very big and glittering and light; tired little Clytie was a large component part of a home, but here she was an unnoticed atom in the universe. Her thoughts flew desolately back with her husband to the house she had just quitted, filled with her dear ones, and brooded over them.

It began to seem as if Mr. Wilkinson were gone a long time. Perhaps he was having trouble in checking the trunks; but he must be all right; he would undoubtedly be there soon.

If a man were looking after you of course everything must be all right! But still he didn't come—it was getting very strange somehow. She leaned forward, searching the oncoming groups with suddenly frightened eyes and beating heart; people stared at her. And still Mr. Wilkinson didn't come! Oh, this was too strange! She rose at last, and her eyes, as she turned, stared terror at a clock. Was that the time? Why, the train must be long gone!

What had happened? No, perhaps he meant to take a later one—and still he did not come!

IV

THE journey home seemed to take but a moment to Langshaw. He made connections; he slept in the train, stumbling out at the right station merely by instinct. But it took a strange effort to insert his key in the lock and enter the house that had been so alive with preparations a few hours before.

Already it wore a strange and almost nauseatingly alien look. A muddy rubber boot of George's lay at the foot of the stairs; his equally muddy overcoat lay on the floor in the library. He went upstairs to see that the sleeping children were all right, and woke the equally sleeping Minna, sitting by Baby. Clytie's dressing table was still in disorder as she had left it; his picture and those of the children were gone; a discarded red wrapper hung over the back of a chair and a worn little red Turkish slipper perched, toe up, on the bed.

Langshaw took off his coat and collar, and putting on his big woolly dressing gown went down to the chilly library. There was no oil in the lamp, but he turned up the gas, thrust a wad of newspapers under a couple of logs on the hearth, and touched a match to them, and, wheeling a big armchair in front of it, sat down with his pipe. His free hour had come at last. He could sit here all night, if he wanted to, and think things out and find some way that in the next few days might make his plans fit in with Henkel's.

Suddenly his eye fell on the dining table, visible through the wide doorway and usually bestowed neatly with a lace centrepiece and fern dish over its mahogany. Now, instead, the white cloth had been left from dinner, pulled untidily, and a couple of dishes remained on it.

If that was the way Minna intended to let things go! The thought lashed him to fury. When was it that little Mary was to take her cough medicine? And how many spoons were there? At the prospect of Mrs. Mulger on the morrow he realized, with a sort of terror, that his mind wasn't free at all; a thousand small, unwonted cares were lurking to invade it. Poor Langshaw felt, with a dull anger, that if a man had to earn a living he couldn't afford to be absorbed by such things; it was in a way an outrage that he should be expected to. The strain of the past weeks was telling on him disastrously, in spite of all his will power. After repeated efforts the wood on the hearth only sent up sporadic wreaths of smoke. The chill emptiness of the house made its way to the soul. He had insisted on Clytie's going; it was all his doing; but why had she gone? None but the one who is left ever knows what it is to be left. There is a rawness of solitude that invades the spirit that can never be told; in the after-comfort of the beloved presence the words for it are lost.

Langshaw tried in vain to imagine that his wife had just run out for an hour at a neighbour's. She seemed to have taken away a part of him with her—in homely parlance, he felt he wasn't "all there";

his working brain, that he had counted on so much, he saw with fear was dull, sodden, inert, with no helpful promise of being anything more under these conditions. That loudly ticking clock in the hall told him how few minutes had been ticked off from an absence that already seemed endless. Six weeks of this sort of thing! Oh, well, it would be different by to-morrow. Yet as eleven o'clock struck he felt as a man may who has gone blind, or as one who is just imprisoned—a life sentence to be gone through and those first two hours so long!

There is, in the daily married companionship of two people who love each other, an overtone that comes from the harmony of that love, independent of and diviner than the conscious efforts of either. It is the thing that cannot be reckoned on, cannot be formulated, cannot be explained, cannot be compelled. It is there or it is not; whether one is sad or lively, differing or agreeing, it ineffably ennobles and revives and inspires.

All discords melt into it, and without it married life is only a sordid struggle weighted down with stupid cares and disappointments, as truly dull as it seems to the eye of an outsider. With Clytie's bodily presence this intangible good, that alone made life worth living, had also departed.

Langshaw rose soberly after a while and went on his accustomed rounds, closing up the house. "Thank Heaven," he breathed, "to-morrow will be a working day"; and fancying that he heard someone fumbling

with the knob of the front door, strode through the hall and opened it. Clytie—strangely altered, her hat rakishly atilt on her tumbled curls, her dark eyes glowing—stood on the threshold.

“You!” he cried. The sight of her, his touch on her arm, sent such a thrill of delicious surprise and unaccustomedness through both, as though they had been separated for years and intoxicatingly re-united, or as if she were his bride and he her husband of an hour, that they found themselves absurdly laughing; and then laughed and laughed increasingly for the sheer foolish happiness of the thing.

But at last they were seated, her hands in his, while she explained:

“I was so scared! I went round, looking. Then I found the porter who had carried Mr. Wilkinson’s bags, and he said that Mr. Wilkinson had stopped to talk to another gentleman and after a while had said: ‘Bless my soul, I’m so absent-minded I’ll miss that train,’ and then he hurried for it and the porter got him aboard just in time. Then I telephoned you twice and they said they couldn’t get you.”

“I was here all the time,” protested Langshaw indignantly.

“Yes, of course, I knew that. Then I met Mr. Stanton, that nice Mr. Stanton you used to know. He’d just come back from somewhere. He wanted to know what you were doing. Well, he carried my bag, put me on the tube, and then I knew I was all right. I had to wait an hour for the last train out here.”

“Stanton!” said Langshaw. And then again in a different tone: “*Stanton!*”

Happiness, the illuminator, struck a vivid flash across a suddenly clear and working brain. Well, why not? Why, of course! Not the way Henkel had intended, but—— No need to think of that now; it would keep. Clytie had found his man for him.

“But how about you, dear?” he asked.

“I’m coming to that. You needn’t try to send me off again to strangers, for I’m not going,” said Clytie. “I’ve been away miles and years! Do you know, Joe Langshaw, that I cried all night for four nights because you were sending me away? It nearly killed me. You sha’n’t do it again. I’ll be good; I won’t sweep. I’ll rest every day; I will, I will! I always knew I could get strong just as well at home. Well, I am willing now.” Her lip trembled, but a smile shone through the dimness in her eyes. “Gracious, has Minna left that table-cloth on? I’ll train her to-morrow!” Her voice changed again. “Oh, Joe, I need you so much—say you needed me, too!”

“Need a little bit of a wife like you!” said Langshaw, with tender scoffing. He rose and took up her wraps. “Do you know what time it is, Mrs. Langshaw? It’s half-past one!”

The smouldering logs in the fireplace suddenly shot up a loudly crackling flame. The angel of a sense of humour had slipped into the house with Clytie, unfurling his amethystine wings, all iridescent, spark-

ling of gold and purple light, until they reached to the ceiling and spread out to the farthest corners of the room, filling all the dark places with little scintillating, dancing gleams. One of them touched Clytie's hair as Langshaw snatched her in his arms.

THE SHELL

JOHN TAUNTON was dressing in his devastated bachelor quarters—from which his friend Grimshaw had gone to be married the day before—his long, thin figure and long, thin face with its slightly crooked nose, deep-set twinkling eyes and pleasant mouth reflected in the mirror in various arresting stages of abstraction; he was purposing to bring his tentative affairs to their foregone conclusion this evening by asking Elisabeth Willard, whom he had known for years, to be his wife. An epidemic of marriage had struck his friends this last year, leaving him somewhat lonely and a little envious.

To see Grimshaw two nights ago, pipe in his mouth, his honest countenance red and contorted with the effort of clearing out his belongings, it was hard to connect him with the romantic ideal; but it had been given Taunton to catch a glimpse of that lovely little bride after the ceremony, when her eyes were resting on Grimshaw's unconscious face with a look so ineffably charged with reverence and adoration and the high passion of giving, that Taunton had averted his gaze with a swelling of the heart. He shook his head ruefully now at the chance of any such idealization in his case. No woman, so far as he knew, had ever

been "in love" with him, with the exception, perhaps, of one he didn't like.

He had always, of course, expected to marry some day; but family demands had absorbed his youth—he had an additional twinge now in the fact that he was really older than he looked—and since then his salary hadn't seemed to keep pace with the latter-day High Cost of Living, though his friends had certainly married unflinchingly even in spite of the reduction of wage which this sudden war depression had wrought.

He had come to a decision now soberly, yet with a real satisfaction and lightness of heart—he was very fond of Elisabeth; if the Great Event wasn't exactly as he imagined it would be, why, it was a truism that few things were.

Reaching for a whisk broom on the bureau he knocked over a Japanese box, the contents of which—studs, dice, damaged scarf pins—went flying over the floor. Taunton uttered an exclamation as a tiny scallop shell met his eye. . . . He picked it up in his long fingers, looking at it with a strangely awakened expression; it brought back to him the face of a girl who had deeply attracted him four years before. He had met her at a ball. It was not only her animated face, with its clear complexion, limpid blue eyes, and warm red mouth that glued his eyes to her; the set of her small chestnut-crowned head, the accentuated rhythm of her light form in the dance, the indescribably lovely way of placing her feet, breathed a perfection of motion that seemed in

some subtle way the outcome of a high and lovely quality of mind. The quality of her voice bore out his thought of her. Her name was Caroline Lovell; her friends called her Carina. He thought of her a good deal afterward, without making any effort to see her. Then a year later he met her with a party at the Beach.

They had talked for an hour, sitting on the sands and watching the waves. She had given him the half of a scallop shell, with the laughing invitation to come and match it with hers when he felt like it.

He had called at her father's apartment, by invitation, in the fall, to find her as delightful as ever, but there were others present. That was more than two years ago and he had not seen her since. Why? It would be hard to say. Perhaps the very force of the attraction acted in its way as a deterrent: any further effort had to be made consciously by himself. There was none of that casual meeting at the houses of friends that insensibly helps along an intimacy.

Taunton stood looking at the shell. . . . Two years! She might have moved anywhere in that time; she mightn't remember him. He knew that her father had died since. An irresistible impulse possessed him. He made for the telephone book and called up the Chalmere. A hall boy answered, "Yes, Miss Lovell is in." In another moment, as it seemed, unbelievably, he heard her voice: "Who is this?"

"Good evening, Miss Lovell! I hate to be so sud-

den, but may I bring my half of the shell to match yours?"

He heard a gasp at the other end.

"How very odd! How *very* odd! Do you know, when you just called me to the telephone I was thinking of you?"

"Were you really? That *was* strange! And may I see you if I come over now?"

"Why, yes, if you—— Yes, indeed."

"All right!" His tone had a note of jubilance in it; he felt suddenly as eager as a boy. "Good-bye till then."

"Good-bye."

He hurriedly completed his preparations with, however, a sobering thought as he went out, that this might, after all, prove to be like any other conventional call, more or less inadequate and boring.

II

MISS CARINA LOVELL lived in a small apartment in an old-fashioned part of the city. The room, as his large figure followed her into it now, contained only a light stand, a few wicker chairs, and a black jardinière with green branches in it, giving a rather pleasant Japanese effect of bareness. It struck Taunton suddenly that her father had left only debts when he died. But that delightful impression of Miss Lovell was instantly the same. She welcomed him, though her hand barely touched his; he had noticed before a shy personal reservation in her frankest moments. She wore a plain white cot-

ton frock, not an evening frock at all; but the slipper that showed under it was silver-buckled and bronze, like her hair. The first greetings over they sat regarding each other.

“Well!” she said, smiling.

“Well!” he returned. He put his hand in his pocket. “Here’s my half of the shell.”

She bent over to touch its tiny translucence with her finger tips. “Oh, I’ve lost mine—I’m so sorry! But it really doesn’t matter, does it? I matched the thought. That counts the same, doesn’t it?”

“It surely does,” said Taunton, his twinkling, deep-set eyes scanning her face. “Tell me, when you answered the telephone you said——”

She put out her hand to stop him, as if listening for some sound beyond.

“Wait a moment, I thought I heard . . . No, it’s all right. Yes, I was just thinking of you; I was in a quandary. You remember, when we had that talk at the Beach, we were speaking about making decisions that involved others, and you said that the simplest way out of a difficulty was often the best. I was wondering quite suddenly to-night what you would think the simplest way in this case, and then I heard your voice! Do you mind if I tell you about it all?”

“I’m honoured.”

“Well—— Oh!” She jumped up suddenly and almost flew from the room. He sat wondering for some minutes before she returned. “One has to be so careful; she mustn’t move at all—Gladys, I mean. You

see, it was like this: Of course, I know she and Bert shouldn't have got married, they were so young and he was making so little, even then." She stopped, her blue eyes raised earnestly to his. "But many people do it, anyway."

"Yes, indeed," said Taunton encouragingly.

"I've been a private secretary in an office since my father died, and Gladys was one of the little telephone girls there, and so pretty. And soon after that Bert lost his job; you know how things have been this winter. Oh, it's terrible not to be able to get work! I can't wonder if he does drink sometimes when he has a few pennies; I might *myself!* When I see that long line of the unemployed as I go to the office each day . . . and they're so thin, and so patient, and —their faces——" Her eyes, fastened on Taunton, brimmed suddenly, her red lips trembled piteously; she made wild, ineffectual dashes at her gown with her lovely hands.

"I thought I had it here; my handkerchief, I mean. Where can it——"

"Take mine," said Taunton hastily, thrusting a clean expanse of linen into her hand. "There, that's right!" he approved cheerily, when her face emerged from its folds, half smiling, though the eyelashes were still wet.

"It's so perfectly silly of me to act this way," she breathed. "But sometimes it just chokes me all up, because, though I do what I can to help, it is so little! But about Gladys and Bert—ten days ago they were turned into the street on account of the rent. I sup-

pose they *never* paid it to the poor landlord! I gave Bert money for the lodging house and brought Gladys home with me; and—that night her baby was born."

"Great heavens!" cried Taunton, completely startled out of his calm.

Carina nodded solemnly, looking at him large-eyed.

"Yes, and there are only hall boys here; but at last we did get the doctor and a nurse." She shivered, her eyes grew bigger. "It was—oh, terrible! It's so strange—isn't it?—when you really *touch* life, and know it's been going on all the time like that, when you never thought of it. . . . You ought to think of it! But all my friends, and at the office—they are furious at me for having Gladys here. They think it's too much for me to do, though a woman comes for a few hours in the daytime, when I'm away. But Gladys has been so very ill—she *couldn't* be moved! And they don't understand. Of course the crowd can't come here now, and I can't leave; they think me headstrong. But it would be all right, really, if it were not for Bert."

"Why, Bert?" queried Taunton, deeply moved.

"Well, naturally he wants to see Gladys—and he *is* a nice boy, and I help out all I can; but the last couple of times he has been—intoxicated; and the people in the house object. You can't blame them! Really, he scared *me* last time; I had trouble making him go. I don't want to send for the police, on Gladys's account, and yet—— What he needs is a steady job. It's perfectly foolish, of course, my tell-

ing you all this, but I'm afraid he's coming to-night, and I don't know just what to do."

"All right, let him come," said Taunton promptly. "I'll take care of Bert."

"Oh, will you really?" said Carina. She clasped her exquisite hands, leaning forward breathlessly, her chin slightly raised; the most charming attitude, Taunton thought, he had ever seen. Her total unconsciousness of self, the quick and lovely changes of expression, her generous warmth of heart and unfailing sense of justice, all touched him inexpressibly.

"I don't know just how to thank you enough . . . Hark!"—as a tiny wail made itself heard—"That *is* the baby." She vanished from the room as she spoke, but after a minute she returned with a white worsted bundle in her arms. "He mustn't wake his little mother. I've brought him in for you to see."

"No!" said Taunton, rising in alarm and backing as she advanced. "No, no!"

"Yes, you must. How perfectly ridiculous!" She came after him more swiftly as he retreated around the room again and again, her face suddenly all a-sparkle with noiseless laughter. "Why, you were once a baby like this yourself."

"Well, I don't remember it," argued Taunton, cornered by the mantelpiece. "Take it away!"

"I won't do anything of the kind." Her voice changed. "He's so little, the littlest thing I ever saw, and so warm and dear." She held out the bundle. "You've *got* to look at him, or you'll hurt

my feelings dreadfully. Nobody will take any interest in him but me! It's dreadful to have *nobody* like him. . . . Please! . . . There—I knew you would." She took up an infinitesimal pink velvet fist and smoothed Taunton's cheek with it. "We know our friends, don't we, little blessed? He loves his own Carina! Isn't he cunning?"

"He's not so bad," said Taunton soberly, looking down into the tiny rounded face in its white worsted nest. "Shake, old fellow! I wish you luck."

"That was just *sweet* of you," she said, with a little tremor in her voice. "Oh, there's the bell!" She dashed over to the button and pushed it, the baby still held fast in one arm, and stood for a moment nodding, large-eyed and confirmatory, at Taunton as the sound of a voice swiftly drew near. "Yes, that's Bert. . . . No, I'll open the door. . . . Oh, Bert, you must *not* make so much noise, they won't let us stay here if you do."

"I'll paste the whole lot of 'em in the snoot," said the boy—he was no more than a black-haired youth, his face red and inflamed.

"What are you keeping my wife and kid here for, living on the fat of the land, and me in the gutter? How many hours did I wait in line to-day?—tell me that—and you living so soft here! You tell me I'll get a job, to keep me out of the way, that's all it is. You give me that kid; you can't turn me out as long as I've got him. He's mine—give him to me, I say!"

He made a futile grab at Carina, shrinking back-

ward, with the child held closer, his arm arrested in mid-air by Taunton's grip.

"Le' go my arm, I say; le' go my arm! you; le' go my arm!"

"Yes, I will not!" said Taunton pleasantly. "You're going to walk straight out of the door with me, just like this. Good-bye, Miss Lovell. I'll telephone you. I'll see he doesn't bother you again!"

His hand took an extra grip on the thin arm he held. "Brace up, will you? If you don't go down these stairs without any noise, I'll choke you. . . . I'm going to take you to my place for a scalding hot bath and a supper and a bed somewhere —just let that sink into your head. We'll look up a job for you to-morrow. Now, don't cry . . . Here, brace up!"

As Taunton walked down the street with his stumbling, weeping charge, he was looking forward to recounting the whole adventure to Elisabeth; it was, without exception, the most extraordinary evening call he had ever made in his life.

III

THE glow of new effort remained with him all the following day, which he had begun by putting Bert temporarily in the hands of the janitor. He had telephoned early to Carina, to receive her grateful approval, with the addition of a ridiculous message that the boy was saying "Hello" to him. Later, after some nerving of himself up to it, he had telephoned again that with her permission he would send some

soup and delicacies for the baby's mother. He had an amused feeling that he had a ready-made family on his hands; there was an odd sort of pleasure in it.

To add to his sense of living in a different world, he received hurried word from Elisabeth that she was starting south that evening with a sick aunt. Taunton saw them off on the train; Elisabeth, tall, dark, and capable as usual in her charge of the invalid relative, adjuring him to purchase a thicker overcoat—she was always managing things for people—amid the hasty and fragmentary adieus and promises to write. He had no chance to talk to her about Miss Lovell.

He couldn't help wondering, as he strolled home afterward, how the latter was getting along.

It was barely nine o'clock now. He hesitated, and then went to the telephone.

Yes, Carina's voice answered; there was a faint note of surprise in it—how a voice "gives itself away" in its delicate gradations over the telephone, with the modifying face of the speaker unseen!—that made Taunton quickly apologize.

"I just thought that you'd like to know that the janitor here thinks he's got Bert a job."

"Oh, that's very kind of you!" The tone was warmer. "Gladys will be so glad to hear it. She has taken some of the soup you sent. Thank you for calling me up."

"And the baby's all right?"

"Oh, yes, he slept like an angel to-day; you turned his luck."

"That's good. I'll escort Bert around to-morrow evening, if you'll let me, to see that he doesn't get into trouble on the way."

"Thank you ever so much. Good-night."

"Good-night."

The reflection came to him as he hung up the receiver that he couldn't call her up again before seeing her the next evening.

His rooms were in dreary disorder. Grimshaw had been the orderly one; Grimshaw, who was reaping undeserved benefits now from that too-charming bride.

Taunton sat, pipe in mouth, given up to disconnected yet deeply interesting thought. When Elisabeth was in charge, after they were married—they might be married pretty soon—they could invite Carina Lovell over to little dinners, and "help her out." There was something fine about that girl, when you came down to it, actually doing the brave, kind things that people would like to do and couldn't. It struck him afresh that she had no ties of her own to interfere.

He had a sudden almost irresistible impulse to call her up, for the fourth time, and say jovially, comrade-like:

"Hello, are you asleep yet? Well, neither am I!" But he knew that it couldn't be done—absolutely it could not.

IV

TAUNTON, during the weeks following, was a busy man; work at the office crowded down on him

by the lessening of the force; his own salary was trenchantly cut in half, just as he had became used to feeling a pleasant ease of expenditure, yet it did not seem to change his plans. He had broached the subject of Carina's affairs, after all, in writing to Elisabeth, but her well-meant replies were somewhat disappointing; she would be glad to help him in any way, though she heard that Miss Lovell, who was very self-willed, was always taking care of queer people. Later he began to resent Elisabeth's capable advice, as if *she* were in charge of the situation instead of he; he needed no suggestions from outside as to Carina's welfare; that wasn't the point.

He did not go to Carina's that next evening with Bert, because Bert had disappeared, but he went there to tell her so.

Bert, strangely, did not return at all, and there were few evenings in which Taunton's large, steadily pacing form hadn't gone down that narrow hall of the tiny apartment on his way to consult or report a conjecture, even though his stay might be only for a few moments.

Gladys did not get well as fast as she should, she was very weak and apathetic; Taunton had had pitiful glimpses of her shrinking figure with long braids down the back, her white, drawn child's face, and drooping lids. But the baby thrived, and Carina's pride in him grew. Taunton began to take a curious half interest in the development of "the boy," who slept out on the fire escape in a box which Taunton had sent over from a grocer's and helped to contrive

into a nest. The infant evolved an absurd one-sided effect of smiling with his tiny mouth when one touched the corner of it gingerly with a long forefinger. Taunton would have liked to touch the corner of Carina's mouth in the same way. . . .

Carina was always extraordinarily herself, swiftly moving, indescribably warm, her clear eyes waiting on his, whole-heartedly interested in every phase of the situation—which remained problematic from day to day—as long as it did not touch the personal note; any impulsive effort at that on his part glanced off as if from invisible armour. Her own affairs were her own. She evidently regarded it as only natural that he should be as deeply concerned in the fate of the unemployed as she, even if Bert hadn't responded as he should, though every day she expected his return. Taunton insisted upon contributing in small ways to the support of Carina's guests—sending fresh eggs and tonics for Gladys at the doctor's order and a warm cloak and hood for "the boy," for which he gravely counted out three dollars into Carina's soft palm—with the sternly resisted desire to kiss it!—after a battle over that money first. He had to admire the baby afterward when thus robed. He had found out that when Carina wanted anything very much for her charges, she always fought him desperately about it before he experienced the masterful pleasure of making her give in. It seemed as if things might go on this way pleasantly forever. But at the end of the fifth week he had begun to notice a change in her; she was thinner and her fairness

seemed in some way translucent; her eyes were extraordinarily bright, her swift movements charged with some new quality. She made absurd jests and laughed at little things; although Gladys had gone back to bed again with a cold, she refused to be discouraged. She was sure Bert would turn up some day to make a nice little home for his family.

Thursday, as it happened, Georgie Frost, a nice young fellow with an upstanding thicket of black hair, and a dimpling smile that concealed a real talent for "business"—Taunton envied Georgie his good looks—held forth illuminatingly at the lunch hour.

"No, believe me, I'm not coming any kick about my salary being cut; I think I'm lucky each week I hold down my job. Dorothy, she's my sister, you know, got fired from her position with a bunch a couple of weeks ago. Of course she's got a home and all that sort of thing anyway; but it's hard for some others. Ever meet Miss Lovell—Carina Lovell?"

Taunton nodded soberly. "Yes."

"She's a perfectly corking girl. Well, Dorothy says she hasn't a penny. She has to give up the apartment she's in. The janitor is to sell the furniture—not that she has much—to pay her back rent. Dorothy has been trying to get her to come to my mother's for a while, to tide over; but she won't, just because she needs to; she's so proud it gives you a pain. She used to go a lot with the crowd at one time, but she's been taking care of a gang of the poor and sick lately—spending all she had on 'em. Guess she'll have to give that up now; Dorothy says she

hasn't enough to eat herself. Gee, she's a queen, that girl! I'd do anything for her myself, only the trouble is you can't—she'd stand in the bread-line first."

"You're all right, Georgie," said Taunton, with strange huskiness. "Have another on me."

Carina losing her job—Carina in the fearsome, pitiful ranks of the Unemployed!

Carina in actual need! The thought threatened to burn with a raging fire as the day went on, until he desperately set himself to the business of control.

If he could find some way to handle the situation. . . .

He hurried from the office, dressed with unusual care, and then dashed over to the Chalmere without the formality of telephoning first, arriving there a little breathless but composed.

To his sharpened gaze, as Carina opened the door, it seemed as if she had been crying; but she smiled up at him, although she was evidently a little surprised.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Taunton! I didn't expect you so soon." Her eyes searched his face. "Had you heard the news about Bert?"

He shook his head as he looked down at her with an effect of extreme and courteous gentleness when he spoke.

"No, I hadn't heard. You can tell me about it later. I would like you to do me a favour, if you will. I want you to put on your hat and things and dine with me at a little Italian place where there's a sort of garden effect that's rather pretty."

She drew back instantly. "Oh, I can't. Gladys is upset; I——"

"I wish you would," he persuaded. "Gladys will be all right; the boy is asleep. Do, *please!* You see it's, er—it's, er—my *birthday*, and I don't want to eat my dinner alone. You'd be doing me a great kindness."

"Oh, well, if that's it." She yielded generously, though still a little surprised. "I will be ready in a few moments."

He heard Gladys's querulous voice and Carina's soothing one. A couple of times before, when she had let him go with her on an evening errand, he had felt the invisible wall between them; it was odd that, when they were off alone together she always seemed farther from him. He almost whisked her bodily out of the house when she appeared in her dark walking suit and the little black velvet hat with the tiny rose-coloured feather; but they walked for the most part in silence, until, turning down a quiet, old-fashioned street, they entered a basement in the rear of which the softly lighted, leaf-branched, glassed-over garden was enshrined. It was a pretty place, with the seductive air of space and emptiness as yet. Taunton drew a breath of relief when seated at the little table, while the waiter scurried for bread and olives. He looked at his companion with tender admiration, as with her coat thrown back over the chair she sat leaning forward, in her white embroidered waist.

“What’s this about Bert?” he asked abruptly. Her face became alight with interest.

“Gladys had a letter from him this morning. He’s enlisted in the United States Army. It’s bad enough, of course; but it might be worse. He might have—— When people can’t get work, there are so many temptations.”

“How about Gladys?”

“She doesn’t seem to mind so much; she’s been so ill it’s dulled her, I think. At any rate, she wrote to her stepmother last week, and she’s coming to take Gladys and the baby to the farm. I shall hate to have them go, but it will be best for them, I know; think of little Goo-Goo growing up with the chickens and all the green things! That’s fine, isn’t it?”

“Yes, indeed,” he assented. “This soup isn’t bad, is it? You’re getting a little more colour.”

He hesitated, then went on with careful diplomacy as he watched her.

“Well, I think perhaps their going may be a relief to you in some ways. What I mean is that when so many people are losing their places in these days —it might happen to you as well as anybody else, you know! And then if you had a family depending on you, you’d feel it pretty badly. Of course, when you only have yourself to care for, it’s just your own lookout, and no great matter, but——”

“Why, that’s just exactly what I say,” broke in Carina; her eyes glowed. “People made such a fuss about it when I lost my job a couple of weeks ago!

They simply *had* to cut down the force at the office, though they hated to the worst way, and it did make me anxious about Gladys and the baby; but now, as you say, it's *nothing*! Sooner or later I'll catch up again, and in the meantime—what *is* it? Of course I don't need the apartment any longer."

"I should say not!" agreed Taunton. "You must help eat up this nice chicken; there are two more mushrooms for you."

"Just a bed anywhere to sleep would do for me. Do you know"—she began to laugh with a daring, mischievous gleam in her eye—"I've often thought I'd like to sit up all night in the park; it would be such an experience!"

"All right; you let me know when you want to, and we'll make a picnic of it," said Taunton stoutly. "But you'd better choose a little warmer weather. By the way"—he knitted his brows slightly—"if you don't mind my obtruding my own affairs——"

"Certainly not."

"Well, I have a little money, not much; but it's lying idle. These are times when one needs all one's income."

"Yes, indeed."

"And I was wondering if you knew of any one, you yourself even, who would like to borrow, say, twenty-five, or even so small a sum as ten dollars, at a fair interest. Of course, it's merely a business matter that a man thinks nothing of."

She had raised her head involuntarily as he spoke; but his matter-of-fact tone reassured her, as she said

half absently, "I'll remember, though I don't think I'd care to borrow, myself."

"Does Gladys need any help?"

She shook her head. "No, the stepmother will pay her way."

As the dinner went on the conversation veered around to other themes. Taunton had her laughing with that delightful laugh of hers by pointing out a resemblance between a fat baby-cheeked man opposite and little Goo-Goo. And when they reached the apartment again he came upstairs for a moment at his inspired suggestion, generously acceded to, to take a last look at little Goo-Goo asleep in his box on the fire escape, all nested down under the stars. But she lifted him out, rolled up in blankets like a cocoon, and offered him, plump and round-eyed, to Taunton's gaze.

"Goo-Goo wants you to hold him a minute. . . . You ridiculous thing, he can't hurt you! Hold out your arms. There!" She stood off for a brief instant. "Do you know what he's doing? He's wishing his big friend luck now, in his turn."

"Why, that's white of you, old fellow," said Taunton, quite absurdly pleased, before she snatched the child away to deposit him once more on his aërial perch.

She came back to Taunton with outstretched hand; her upraised eyes showed very bright as if from some slight moisture. "Good-bye. Don't think I haven't appreciated all your kindnesses—and to-night—I'm not so stupid that I didn't know."

"Kindness nothing!" said Taunton hotly.

"Oh, yes! I knew! I never quite realized before how understanding you are. All my other friends—they mean it well—but they batter you so. I don't think it helps much to be battered at, even if you deserve it, do you?"

"I hate it myself," said Taunton truthfully. "Well,"—he still lingered hesitatingly; sweet as she was, he began to feel the barrier again—"and you move out to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"You'll let me know your address?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Not right away, perhaps, but of course, I'll let you know. I'm looking forward to the change—it starts you off in new ways. . . . So, good-night!"

This time he held her hand a second longer. There was a sweet friendly expression in her eyes before her palm slipped, as ever, from his. As he looked back from the stairs she was still by the open door; her smile made a light for him. He went down the street with a sort of strange, wistful happiness, below which lay a quickening anxiety. After all, she had given no address, she didn't want to see him again for a while. As he entered his own rooms he felt reproached that they were so securely comfortable; how willingly he would move out and leave her there if it were possible! Why wasn't it—why couldn't you do a simple human thing like that? Carina would have found some way to make it possible, if she were in his place! Perhaps Elisabeth could,

when she returned this week. And Carina didn't care to see him again for some time! By an odd transition of thought that discouraging mirror opposite seemed to show him a little homelier and heavier-looking than before. He was a good, efficient friend, perhaps, but no winner of hearts.

Early the next morning he received a night letter from Elisabeth saying that they would be arriving in town that day convoyed by a Mr. Clarence Thrush who had been very kind to Aunt. Mr. Thrush was a man for whom Taunton, in the masculine phrase, had no use; though he was glad, of course, of Elisabeth's return. The letter seemed extraordinarily colourless, though she would try and aid Carina.

He plunged into the hustling stress of a business morning without much success, however. . . . Why, under heaven, hadn't he *made* Carina tell him where she was going? Why had he submitted so tamely to her will? The thought was unbearable.

At the lunch hour he took the subway up to the Chalmere. He feared sickeningly that she had already gone; but the door opened to his push on the button and he stood aside before ascending the stairs, as he met a procession of men carrying off her poor little goods and chattels under the supervision of the janitor; the chairs he had sat on, the little round table, the Japanese screen, the bed Gladys had occupied, and another little brass one that must have been Carina's. Taunton felt the blood mounting to his forehead—these things were so much a part of her!

When the way was clear he dashed up and went in at her still open door. She was standing there in the dark little street suit, her hat on, looking like a flower in the bare room. The sunlight poured through the window; Goo-Goo's sleeping box, the only thing left, showed on the fire escape. She gave a little cry of surprise as she saw him.

"How on earth did you come here at this time?"

"I had business up-town, and thought I'd look in. By the way, you forgot to give me that address last night."

"Yes. It—well, it hardly seems worth while. Nobody could come and see me there; it's quite decent, but there isn't any parlour. I'm to share Susy Steiner's room—you don't know her—for a few days; I hate to tell people, they make such a fuss! It's *very* cheap." Something in his waiting attitude seemed to drag the words from her against her will; she mentioned a number far over on the East Side. "The room is dark; but I shall be out all day hunting a job, so that won't matter!"

"No," said Taunton carelessly. He went over to the fire escape, and bringing in Goo-Goo's box, turned it bottom up beside her. "Sit down; you're tired."

She obeyed with a sigh, saying, "There's room for you, too."

"All right," he said happily. They both sat a couple of minutes in silence, Taunton looking straight ahead of him. A faint sound made him turn suddenly. Carina's slight form was shaking so that

the little rose-coloured feather in her hat vibrated; her face was buried in her hands.

“You’re not crying!” he exclaimed in horror.

“Oh, I never act this way, never! I don’t know what’s got into me.” He made out the words between her convulsive sobs. “Oh, no, no, it isn’t what you think. I don’t care where I live or what I do, not in the least. But—I miss them so!” Her voice rose uncontrollably. “Gladys and the ba-a-aby! I’d taken care of Goo-Goo more than she had. Gladys was so glad to go—I don’t blame her; but they both seemed to belong to me so much and now they don’t need me at all! You do what you can for people and, after all, you’re only a stranger.”

“Don’t you care,” said Taunton. He took down the hand from her eyes, and after a moment’s instinctive resistance she let it lie passively in his.

“It’s—it’s so silly—isn’t it?—to be hurt because you don’t happen to be needed any more.” She tried convulsively, with the aid of a tiny handkerchief, to get back her composure.

“I wouldn’t let that bother me,” said Taunton; he put his other hand, big and warm, over hers. His voice had a gentle steadiness, with the suspicion of a tremor underneath. “You see, I need you, Carina; I need you very much.” He could feel a surprised, arrested tension in her. “I think I’ve been in love with you ever since I first met you, though I didn’t know it then; but I do now! Oh, I know it now! If you’d only let me marry you and take you home to my little flat——”

A strange dizziness seemed to come over him with the words; he forced himself to forge stumblingly ahead in the face of her silence: "I don't suppose the prospect is particularly attractive—I'm a homely sort of a fellow with a crooked nose"—a ghost of a smile crept around the corner of her mouth; she made a quick movement as of denial—"and I'm not wildly exciting, and I'm rather poorer than I'd like—and I'm not as young as I was ten years ago—I don't know that you could ever care for me. . . . Well?"

Carina inclined her head half childishly. "Oh, I'm afraid—I might," she said. "But——"

"But what, dear?" He tried to draw her closer, but she withheld him.

"How about Miss Willard?"

Taunton felt suddenly struck down and stunned.

"Yes; aren't you bound to her?"

"No—not exactly."

"Oh, but really, even if not exactly. I know a friend of hers who told me. . . . If she loves you—if you've given her the right to think you cared—you did, didn't you?"

"I—perhaps."

"Then you must fulfill your part. I couldn't do that kind of thing, ever—take a man from another woman that way. You must go to her first."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you'll have to ask her to marry you as you meant to, before——"

"But, Carina!" He thought hotly of Georgie's

words: "She's so proud she gives 'you a pain.'" "I can't; it's all changed."

"Yes, you can; you'll have to! You really are fond of her, even if you don't think so now. At any rate, I couldn't have any respect for you if you didn't: if you weren't honourable. You owe it to her to let her decide. You do owe it to her, don't you?"

"Oh, if you say so!" said Taunton half sullenly.

"And you mustn't see me any more until—unless—" A tremor went over her as if she might break down into weeping again, but she went on unflinchingly: "And you mustn't bother about me at all. I'll be all right! You've been so lovely to me."

She had drawn her hand from his as they both rose. There was a light of exaltation in her eyes; Taunton drew a long breath.

"Very well," he said abruptly. "I accept the conditions, if I must."

"Good-bye."

"No, it's not good-bye. I'll see you to-night sometime—afterward anyway—even if it's late."

There was one thing going over and over in his brain, as he walked away, sending a more and more exultant, indescribable thrill through him—his words, "I don't suppose you can ever care for me," and hers, "Oh, I'm afraid I might; oh, I'm afraid—I might!" They sang themselves into the very beatings of his heart: "Oh, I'm afraid I might!"

Was it true that only six short weeks ago he had been dressing to go over and ask Elisabeth to marry him? What had deflected him? Could it have been

so slight a thing as a shell, brought up from the depths of the ocean by the winds and waves for this very purpose? If he hadn't knocked that box over—if this had been lost out of his life—

He stopped dead short, in sudden overpowering revolt. Going from Carina now—why? Because she had told him to.

“I’ll be hanged if I will,” he said to himself wrathfully. “I’ll be hanged if I will!” He turned and dashed back up the street. He couldn’t get to her fast enough to repudiate that monstrous bargain; but she had already gone! It seemed years before evening came, and he was free to seek her again.

The narrow, dingy, brick iron-railinged house of which Carina had given him the address was flanked with garbage cans. An old and unshaven man in shirt sleeves came to the door; he was indicating the way to the room of Miss Steiner and her friend, on the fourth floor, when Carina herself, still in the little dark street suit, appeared on the stairs.

“I was looking out for you,” she said rapidly. “Susy says sometimes we can see people in the dining room; it’s terribly funny, isn’t it? Come down in the basement.”

Taunton silently followed her to the designated spot, nearly filled with a long table set for a breakfast, the rolled up napkins of the guests ornamented with various strings for identification. By the dim light of the turned-down gas jet Carina seemed a pale, shadowy presentment of her warm and lovely self, yet something in her eyes made his heart bound.

His arms were around her before he knew. The touch of her was more exquisite and wonderful than anything he could have imagined.

“You’ve been to her?” she breathed.

“No, I haven’t been to her, and I’m not going to, no matter what you say. You’re going to do just as I say this time! You’ve run yourself long enough without anybody to stop you; it’s idiotic, it’s suicidal! Do you hear? You’re going to do just as I say. I am the Master of your fate, I am the Captain of your darling soul in this instance! What—what, dear—what? Why—Carina!”

The blood suddenly mounted to his face—she was looking at him as that lovely bride had looked at Grimshaw.

CHILD OF THE HEART

I HAD been out of the hospital a month, and had taken the children from St. Mary's Home and was settled with them at last in the few rooms I'd hired on the ground floor of a poor cottage at the end of the town, before any consciousness that I'd had another baby came to me; and then it was in a sudden, odd kind of way.

I was sitting on the edge of the bed, my gown partly off and my hair hanging down over my shoulders—I was as thin as a rail—feasting my eyes on my four little ones rolling a ball on the floor; my big boy, Louis, who was eight, and Pauly and Marie and three year-old Catherine; no one, not if they were worth millions, could have had grander children! with their beautiful, clear, rosy skins, their blue eyes and light wavy hair, and their lovely sturdy legs. They were all fair like me; their father was French and dark. When I took them out people's eyes always followed them; they had a way of walking like him, with their shoulders thrown back and their heads held high, as though they came of the lords of the land, instead of having only a workingman for their father.

And while I sat there now looking at them, I found myself with my arms folded as if I were holding Something; and I rocked to and fro with that feeling of a

little round head on my bosom . . . and it came over me that I had a baby and didn't know where she was. And the thought was as sharp and terrible as a cut with a knife, so that I gasped with the pain and ran out of the room. But in a minute it was gone. That was the only way that I remembered, for well over a year, at odd times like, when I least expected it, when I found myself rocking and crooning, with empty arms, to the baby that wasn't there.

But for the most part of the time I never thought of her at all; I had given her away before I ever felt that she was mine. It was all like a bad dream.

It was this way, you see: When Antoine,—I had married him at seventeen, out of the high school,—my lovely, brown-eyed, merry, warm-hearted Antoine, fell from the scaffold—he was a builder—he was dead, they say, before he touched the ground. But I never saw him again after he kissed me good-bye that morning, when I didn't know it was for the last time. It was three weeks before the baby was born, and I went sort of wild with the longing to see him once more, just once was all I'd ask! And with that was the thought, drumming over and over in my mind, how I was ever to earn a living for the children with yet another to hamper me. It didn't seem now as if the one that was coming were mine; all feeling had been killed in me.

When I talked to the matron at the hospital she was very kind. She told me she knew of some good people who would be very glad to have the baby and

bring it up, if I were willing to give it away entirely. And it seemed, in my weakness, as if a great weight had been taken off my mind—only I cried, I didn't know why. I was so ill afterward that everything was a haze. They told me the baby was a little girl. I never even saw her, to realize it; I seemed, as I looked back, to have been conscious only once, propped up with pillows and seeing a strange gentleman with black eyebrows looking at me. I heard him say: "What eyes she has!"

Then somebody asked: "Are you still willing to give away the child, Mrs. Blanchet?"

And I said "Yes," and I signed a paper with the pen they handed me. Then I went down and out again for a long time.

Antoine had belonged to a benevolent order, and their money buried him and kept me for a while after I got back. Mrs. Hallett, the clergyman's wife, wanted me to keep the two younger children in the Home and send Louis and Pauly to a farm in the West.

"And in that way," she said, "you will be free to learn to do something worth while." She was one of the nicest ladies, and one of the least understanding I ever knew. She never seemed to think with her heart.

I looked pretty weak and thin, but I knew I'd make out somehow. Why, it was life for me to touch and handle the darlings and bathe and dress them; it was like taking in life at my fingers' ends. Miss Lily, though she hadn't any children of her own, understood!

I went out for day's work at first, sending the children to school and running back at lunch time to give them a bite, if I went without my own; but after a while I got a little trade at home. I did up curtains and laces and fine dresses. One lady told another about me.

But one day, when my tall, pretty Miss Lily came in from the Settlement to the room where I was smoothing out a lace collar in my fingers, she kept looking at me while she talked, and all of a sudden she got up and took the collar from me and held my hands close in hers.

"You poor thing!" she said. "What is the matter?"

For a moment I couldn't speak, and then I said in a whisper:

"It's Antoine's—it's my husband's birthday. If I could only see him once more—it's all I'd ask, ever. . . . Just once! You see, I didn't know it was for the last time when he went out of the door."

Well, that very afternoon I was taking back a bundle of laces, as it happened, alone; I usually had one of the children with me—when you haven't your husband you have to hold on to a child's hand; it's like linking you here to him where he is, above.

And down the road from the big house on the hill into which the new rich people had just moved, came a nurse in a cap and a long white apron, and a long, flying-back dark cloak. She was pushing a white wicker baby carriage. There was an eighteen-month baby sitting up straight inside, with pink bunches of

ribbon on either side of her cap, her little hands beating the pink, lacy coverlet, and as she came nearer I looked straight into Antoine's big brown eyes, his eyes with the long, curling black lashes, and the dark, curved eyebrows with the little upward twist to the corners; Antoine's dark curls were on her forehead, his dimple at the corner of her mouth, that little mole of his in front of her left ear, and as she smiled at me —for she smiled!—the little red lips went up at one corner just as his had done.

I knew, and it was as if my heart turned over within me; I knew, past anybody's telling me, that this was my own child.

I'd promised the things and I hurried on with my legs shaking, and the earth and sky whirling around me. . . . I couldn't think at all. But as I came back over the hill I caught a glimpse of the carriage in the pine grove by the lake, and I turned off down there and dropped myself on the other end of the bench on which the nurse sat. The baby was asleep—but she was my child.

"That's a beautiful little girl," I said. My voice sounded strange.

"Yes, everybody says that," she answered, straightening herself up and as I saw, wild to talk to someone, the way all nurses are. "But it's a lonesome job taking care of her, though I'm well paid. She's brought up modern and hygienic!"

"What's that?" said I, without taking my eyes off that little sleeping face.

"You're never allowed to talk to her or play with

her, because it interferes with her developin' herself; and out of doors, she has to be winter and summer, day and night; she sleeps in a crib on the porch with curtains that's drawn if it rains or snows, because she's delicate like her mother—that's why I have her out here under the pines. They have the grandest doctors for her. We have a trained nurse now that's like a eagle, she spies on you so fierce; everything goes by her word. It would make your heart ache sometimes to see the mother look at the child when she's brought into the house and longing to have it for a while to herself, and to kiss it and fondle it, and not daring to."

"Why not?" said I, turning hot and cold.

"It's not hygienical," said the nurse, going on like a mill stream. "The baby's never allowed to be near other children, for every one of 'em's contagious but her; and no chanst do I get to see my own friends for fear of the germs I'll be bringin' off 'em. If the head nurse knew I was talkin' to you she'd fire me. The father, maybe he has other notions, but he's that crazy about the mother he'd do anything in life to please her. The child's to go to the finest schools and learn all languages, and travel in kings' countries, and if she's after having what they call a genious she's to use it in any way she fancies, op'ra singin', or play-actin', or marryin' a prince. Every night when himself comes in the first thing he says is:

"And how is our little Toinette to-day?" She's christened Antoinette after her mother."

Antoinette! Did you ever in your life hear any-

thing like that? I fell to trembling worse than ever. My head was swimming with all the talk of "her mother," and "her father"—Antoine's child! She opened her eyes and looked up at me, and I got up and ran home before I should scream, and when I got there I sat on the side of my bed, and rocked and rocked—I wanted to hold Antoine's little girl tight in my own arms, to kiss her, to feel her mine. Why, it was just as if he had sent her to me from out of heaven!

The next day I went up to the matron of the hospital in the city, but I got nothing from her. My baby was legally the child of other parents who loved her and I had no right to her any more. She wouldn't even tell me their name, but she started and changed colour when I told her that I knew it was Carrington. Oh, I knew well they'd never give her up! It roused something wild and fierce in me. I went home clean beat out, and the next morning I couldn't raise my head from the pillow, and my big nine-year-old boy Louis came to my bedside and said:

"You just stay in bed, Mummie,"—that was what they called me,—"and we'll bring your breakfast in to you." And so they did. My children were all the handiest little things! They were like Antoine that way! There wasn't one of them, not even little Catherine, who couldn't fry an egg or turn a pancake or make a piece of toast; they cooked for each other often, and it was pretty to see their fair little faces, so wise and eager, over the pan.

Well, I got so that whenever I saw the baby car-

riage going over the hill to the pines, I'd let everything else go and start up the hills to the pines, myself. And every time I looked into the brown eyes of my baby my heart jumped so I thought Rose must hear it. She was glad to have me to talk to for a few minutes. Toinette grew to know me, and clapped her hands. She had the dearest little voice. She would talk to the toys in her lap, the dolly and the Teddy Bear, and stretch out her hands to the birds and the squirrels. But I never dared to touch her; I didn't know what I might do or say if I touched her. For oh, beautiful as she was, she hadn't the look of the child that's warmed and fed by love; she wasn't hardy, for all her grand nursing.

Once I got a little cap of hers to clean, the darling little cap, with the pressure of her head in it. And when I took it back I saw Mrs. Carrington.

She was a slender lady, with all sorts of lacy things falling over her gown; she had pretty, fady blue eyes, and a little half smile around her pale mouth, and something drooping, yet sweet, about her as if she knew everyone was going to be good to her; you couldn't help wanting to yourself. In one way I liked her, and in another I hated her.

I had been taken up the back stairs to a small room, and as she took the cap out of the paper she said:

“You have done this very nicely. Step in here and I will give you some more of my baby's things to do up!” She opened a door as she spoke, and I walked after her into the nursery.

It was the most wonderful room I had ever been in;

it was full of broad windows, and everything in it was a satiny, creamy white, the floor, the furniture, and half the walls—the upper part was all pictures in blues and greens and pinks and yellows. There were a great many playthings, dolls sitting on chairs or lying in beds, and all sorts of animals.

“It is a pretty room, isn’t it?” said Mrs. Carrington, as if I had spoken, and smiling as if she were pleased. “You see there’s no bed; my baby sleeps on the porch outside her nurse’s room.” She walked over to the cupboard and took out a couple of lace coats. “I will give you these to do up. Ah, here comes my baby now!” And sure enough, the little thing ran in,—Rose and the trained nurse, the stiffest thing! behind her,—turning her sweet eyes on me.

“She’s a lovely baby,” I said. My voice sounded thick in my ears, but the lady didn’t notice.

“It’s time for her bath, ma’am,” said the nurse, “before she has her supper.”

“Oh, dear, it’s always time for something!” said Mrs. Carrington, smoothing the baby’s hair; but she didn’t kiss her, Rose was right there. “So many rules and regulations for my darling!”

As we left the room I looked back to see a door opened to a little white porcelain bath beyond, and a white weigh-scales, and what not, all fit for a little princess.

“You have children?” she asked.

“Five,” I said.

“Five,” she repeated, but not as if she really heard

me. "You must have your hands full. I have only one, you see." She smiled proudly, yet wistfully, too, and my heart suddenly ached for her. She took out her purse and paid me the quarter for the cap. She was so sweet and gentle, it puzzled me what it was I missed in her.

Her husband came in just before I went; he was a tall man, with heavy black eyebrows and a straight mouth. When he stopped still he seemed to stand very quiet, without an eyelash moving, and I knew that he was the man I had seen in the hospital.

I heard him say, "Who is that?" And his wife's voice answered: "It's Mrs. Blanchet from the village. She's doing up some things for Toinette."

I turned at the foot of the stairs to see him smiling at his wife, and he looked quite different. But if I had needed to know any more, I knew it then.

And, oh, my child was well off; she had all the care that money could buy, there was no lack there—though there *was* a lack. . . . But if I couldn't have her openly for my own, I could at least feast my eyes on her every day, and for once, if for once only, I would have her secretly for my own—I had a plan.

When I got home, I can't tell you how poor and bare and dark my rooms looked, no place for *her*! The children ran to meet me, helter-skelter, their hair flying, and I kissed them and listened to their talk, and got the supper and put them to bed.

And when they were fast asleep I went to the cupboard and took out fresh white covers for my bureau

and the table, and I got all the candles I had and stuck them in candlesticks or anything I could find, and put them on the mantel and on the table below it, and I hunted some flowers out of the garden, tall, pearly white and golden flag lilies, and set them in between the candles. 'Twas somehow to me as if my little dark bedroom was to be made like the High Altar. And when all the village was still, and the lights mostly out, only for the rising moon, I lighted my candles and went my way silently up the hill, a dark shawl over me. The house was built on a slope and the porch where the baby slept, that was the second story from the front, was not far above the ground in the back. With a bench and a box from the area way I managed to get to the top of the brickwork and then climbed over the stone railing, and pushed aside the screen. Oh, my God, there lay my little Antoinette, her face white like a flower toward the moon, the dark curls brushing her cheek.

I slipped my arms under her—she was in a sort of white woolly sleeping bag—and lifted her to me, so gradually that she didn't know that she was being moved. And still holding her close on one arm I managed slowly to edge myself over the railing again and reached the ground, and went swiftly, yet holding her steadily, down the hill. But of a sudden she stirred and opened her eyes and began to whimper. The voice of her! I was mad with joy. And the feel of her! "You darling! You darling!" I whispered. "You're with Mummie now, you're with Mummie——" And when she heard my voice

she stopped crying and put her little hand to touch my face. And so we came into my altar room, all set with the candles and the pearl and golden lilies, and my baby raised her head and stretched out her arms and said, "Pretty, pretty!" Oh, the darling, the darling! And I took off all the things she was bundled in. And then I went and waked the sleeping children and said:

"Come and see what Mummie has for you!"

So they came stumbling out one by one, Louis and Pauly and Marie and Catherine, the hair falling over their sleepy eyes, and then they all screamed at once and ran forward.

There on the table, in the midst of the flowers, with the altar lights behind her, stood my baby in her little white shirt, with her lovely bare arms and neck, her bare legs and dimpled feet, her head with the brown curls thrown back, and her big brown eyes shining solemnly; but at the sight of the children's faces she began to laugh, her red lips parting to show the tiny white teeth.

"Oh, Mummie, is it an angel?" cried Marie.

And I said, "Yes, she's come down to play with you."

And then I set her on the floor and they all danced around her, she laughing with delight and plucking at them, and each one had to touch and hold her, her little pink toes curling up when they kissed them. Oh, she knew her brothers and sisters that she was born to, and that I had cheated her of! When I looked in the glass I didn't know myself, my cheeks

were so red. When I packed them off to bed again I said:

“Mind you, there’s not a word to pass your lips to any living soul about our little angel. Remember that, Louis, and Marie, and Catherine, and Paul.”

Then I put out all the lights but one and took my baby into my own narrow bed with me. I kissed her from her curls to her little warm feet, and she went to sleep, sighing and cooing with content, as I kissed her—she was mine, mine, *mine!*

I lay awake while she slept so as not to lose a minute of her. I can’t tell you of my joy and my pain. God lets love hurt us so much, doesn’t He! But before it was light,—and oh, the dawn comes so early in the spring!—I was up the hill with her, still sleeping, in my arms, and put her in the crib on the porch outside of the room where the trained nurse slept—I’d outwitted her for all her training!

But after that, if I’d thought I’d be satisfied I was mistaken; I wanted my baby more than ever. I kept watching to see Rose wheeling the carriage over to the pines, and then I’d leave everything and run.

How is it that you can’t keep what you’re thinking out of the world? My children never told about that night when I stole their little sister for them; small as they were they never told. But one evening Louis began to cry, sobbing, with his face in his hands turned away from me, and though I asked him why, he wouldn’t speak. Children are so much wiser than we. Sometimes I was afraid of Louis. It isn’t what you do or say, it’s your thoughts that you can’t

guard, that slip away from you, and find their way into the minds of others. It seemed to me that people began to look strangely at me.

One day I met Mr. Carrington in the town, and Rose didn't come to the pines the next day or the next, or the next. The day after that, Miss Lily came in for a China crêpe shawl of her mother's. She'd brought a chocolate apiece for each of the children—sweet thing, the mother's heart of her!—and they'd thanked her prettily, they had nice manners, and she said, looking at Marie: "Do you know, Mrs. Blanchet, Mrs. Carrington's little girl always reminds me of your children, though her colouring is so different! She has the same way of holding her head, and there's something in her smile. She's such a dear little thing; I'll miss her when they go."

"When they go!" I repeated, staring at her.

"Yes, they sail on Saturday. Mr. Carrington has business in France, so they're going there to live. Mrs. Blanchet, you really must not work so hard, you look *terribly*!"

"Oh, I'm all right, Miss Lily," I said.

Going away, going to take my child away, and to France, her *father's* country!

That night I went up the hill, it was black dark with no moon, and I crept over the railing of the porch and stole my baby once more.

So I brought her home to have her in my arms for the few hours that I might—and what I would have done or not have done the night decided for me.

It rained. The heavens opened, and the waters

fell down in torrents; the thunder crashed, the lightning flared; the drops rattled on the roof with a noise so loud and continuous you couldn't hear yourself speak, and the wild wind hurled them at the window panes so that they were like to break; did one storm seem as if it would die down, another followed it. The children were frightened and came running out of their beds to me—little Toinette cried; I had to walk the floor with her. I couldn't have taken her back again if I would. And I was frightened at what I'd done—and afraid of Mr. Carrington—but I knew I'd have done it all over again.

It was seven o'clock, with the children up and the rain stopping at last, that Mrs. Barns, a woman who lived above me, put her head in at my door, and says:

“Have you heard the news? The Carringtons’ baby has been stolen! She disappeared in that awful storm last night. Ain’t it terrible!”

“Stolen!” said I, with a quick glance behind me. The children were all in the inner room. “Have they—any clue?”

“I don’t know. Mr. Carrington was away last night, but they’ve sent for him. Mrs. Carrington is wild.”

It was all only what I expected to hear, and yet—there’s such a strangeness in it when bad things come true!

But I went back to the children when she left, with the baby running around among them on the floor and laughing, her little head thrown back and her eyes, Antoine’s big brown eyes, shining. She ate

all her breakfast of bread and milk with the rest. She had a look about her she'd never had before, the look *loved* children have. The others had their breakfast and went to school—only Louis looked at me strangely. And after I bathed the darling in the green tin foot-tub, and dressed her in some old things of Catherine's, I was waiting all the time for the moment to come when she'd be taken from me.

And it came! When I heard that knock on the front door I opened it to Mr. Carrington.

He was alone. He strode in, his face black and stern, and when he saw the child in my arms he put out his hand and pulled her from me, though I tried to hold on to her. I screamed, and he said sternly: "Why not? She's mine. Oh, I knew where to look for her all right! I've been watching you ever since I recognized you at the house. Now I want to tell you, you've got to stop this game. You won't make anything by it."

"Make anything by it?" What did he mean? "But she belongs to me!" I stammered.

"She belongs to my wife and myself," he said. "You can be sent to prison for stealing her. Don't you know that? If we weren't sailing to-morrow morning I'd have you put where you couldn't do any more harm. *Your* child! What kind of a mother were you to give her away? What kind of a mother are you now to want to take her from all the comforts and luxuries of life, with everything to make her good and happy when she's growing up, and drag her down instead to"—he glanced around—"this! If

you were to die, what's to become of her? Do you want her to go to the poorhouse? You're a wicked, selfish woman, and when you talk of mothers—you don't care whether you break her true mother's heart or not!"

He saw her sleeping bag and picked it up from a chair and wrapped it around her all wrong, like a man does, and strode out the door with her in his arms, and off up the hill, me hurrying along behind him, wringing my hands as I went. I saw people staring, but I took no heed. Once he looked back to see me following; the baby was laughing at me over his shoulder. I went into the house after him to where Mrs. Carrington was sitting in her drooping laces, and she gave a cry when she saw the little thing in her husband's arms and ran and snatched the child to her.

"Oh, Hubert! I knew you'd find her, I knew—Why—" She stopped, for she saw me, my hair in wisps against my face, my lips twisting, and my hands twisting, too, against my apron.

"*What eyes she has!*!" she said, drawing back as if in terror. She turned questioningly to her husband, and he nodded.

"'Twas as I thought," he said. "This is the woman. You'd better go," he ordered, not roughly, but I knew I had to obey. Yet first. . . .

"Madam," I said, "it's only a word I have to speak. Your husband's been telling me how cruel I was to give my child away, and how cruel I am to want her now, cruel to you, and to her. I'd tell you what I

went through before she came, if I could make you understand all my trouble—if I could make *any one* understand what it is to have your husband die and leave you! And it's true all Mr. Carrington says—I'm selfish to want her—yes—if she were *my* baby alone I'd give her up to you again, yes, I would!—But she's her dead father's child, too! She's a part of him, come back from heaven to me. There's something in me that's stronger than I—God put it there. And I can't let her go; I can't, I can't, I *can't!*"

I had fallen on my knees with sobbing. "You may take her away to the ends of the earth, but you can't take her from my heart's longing, and it will come between you and her till I die!"

I heard the lady's voice saying, "Oh, Hubert!" as if faint-like, and somebody picked me up, and I found myself at home more dead than living.

Late that evening a carriage stopped by my gate, and Mr. and Mrs. Carrington got out. He had my baby in his arms.

His wife was clinging to him, very white, but cold and proud-looking. "We have come to give you back the child," he said in that stern voice of his. He put up his hand imperiously. "Don't speak, please. My wife and I have made up our minds. My wife feels that knowing of Toinette's parents makes a great difference in her own feeling of possession—the thought of another living mother is unpleasant to her. And she is very tender-hearted." His voice broke a little; that the man loved his wife

was plain to be seen! "To think of your longing for the child would take all her own pleasure and comfort away. So we give Toinette back to you.—*Wait!* One thing is to be clearly understood: One such trial is enough. We will never take the child back under any circumstances. You are never to make any appeal to us!" His voice wasn't as hard as his words. He was looking at his wife.

"Never!" I whispered, but I only looked at the lady; our eyes hung on each other for a moment. I tried to say, "May the Lord bless you," and she came close to me, and I put up my lips, and we kissed each other, as if we might have been sisters, each so sorry for the other.

Then they left me with my darling child, Antoine's and mine. . . . "Mummie, Mummie!" she cried, and patted my face with her little hand.

But wouldn't you think it strange? That other woman loved the child, yet she never sent one of the baby's little clothes down to her when they left. Christmas or a birthday, since, never anything has come. Kind she was, but I knew from the first that she hadn't the real heart of a mother!

Sometimes I'm frightened that I won't be able to work as hard as I ought. Louis says:

"Mother, I'm going to begin and earn money soon for my little angel sister," for I'd told him all. But oh, will she judge me when she grows up, and finds what I've kept from her?

HER JOB

MRS. IRVING, in her white gown, slender and gray-eyed, sitting behind the coffee urn facing her husband with the newspaper, felt unusually languid and weak this morning. She often thought she could stand the day better if it did not begin with breakfast, or if, paradoxically speaking, it came after luncheon, when one was more physically braced for discouragement and the devolving cares of the household.

Even if the service hadn't all depended on one maid, it was Mr. Irving's rule, harrowingly never carried out, that the household should be assembled at one and the same moment at the matin meal. In the home in which he himself had been brought up it was a cult that all virtue depended on early rising and being prompt at breakfast. The little ten-year-old Cecilia, as was often fondly noted by Cousin Lizzie, was a real Irving in her morning wakefulness; white-haired Cousin Lizzie, fresh in her lavender gingham, was an Irving, too; but the eldest son and Lily and Jack, as well as their mother, took after the Vanes—delightful people, but who hadn't the advantage of having been brought up as Irvings.

Mrs. Irving, as she waited nervously for the delinquents—while she tried to listen to what her hus-

band read from the paper—was, as usual, divided between sympathy for them and for him. He was so good that it was a shame not to try to please him—and just when poor father was going through so much with his business!

“Oh, there’s Jack now!” she said.

“I couldn’t get dressed sooner because Vane wouldn’t let me have my shoes,” complained Jack, a curly-haired boy of fourteen. “I wish you would make Vane stop; he——”

“Be quiet, dear, your father is reading,” murmured the mother.

She motioned to Ellen to take away the toast by Cousin Lizzie’s plate and bring a piece that wasn’t burned on the edge, and held up a warning finger to the pretty, slender Lily, a girl of twenty, who twined her arm around her father’s neck and kissed him lightly as she passed, already hatted and cloaked for the train, while he reached up a hand and fondly patted her cheek, though he went on with the paragraph.

Seven people had been rescued from a spectacular fire, in a building which Mr. Irving had once occupied, through the continued efforts of one special fireman who had himself succumbed afterward. Cousin Lizzie made little murmurs of interest during the recital, with exclamations of horror at the end; everyone said how brave the poor fireman was to stay at his post.

“Well, that was his job,” said Mr. Irving hardly. He folded the paper. “Jack, don’t make such disgusting noises when you eat. Where is Vane, Marla?

Why can't that boy ever get down to breakfast on time?"

"Here he is," she said nervously, with an appealing glance at her oldest son. Vane was twenty-two, dark, handsome, forceful looking, and at the moment with an enigmatic expression as he met his mother's gaze.

"Good morning." His salutation embraced the table. "I don't want any breakfast." His hand waved off a protest. "No, Mother! I don't want any; I'll get something to eat in town. I've got to stop at the tailor's for my coat on the way to the station. Good-bye!" He had kissed her and was already gone.

"Mother, Ellen has given me cold mutton sandwiches for my lunch when she knows I hate cold mutton," clamoured Cecilia. "Mother, I can't eat cold mutton; *Mother*, I can't eat cold mutton—*Mother*, I can't!"

"Hush, Cecilia! I'll see that you have something else," said the mother. Her eyes roved anxiously to the husband as he rose. "What was the matter with your eggs? You haven't touched them."

"Oh, nothing, only they were too hard," he answered. He was a large, fine-looking man in his gray business suit; his somewhat clouded face took on a kindly expression as he kissed her good-bye in his turn. "Now remember and take care of yourself to-day, dear. Coming in with me, Lily?"

"Yes, Father." She gathered up her music roll—Lily studied both vocally and instrumentally at the conservatory.

"I don't know what time I'll be home; don't wait dinner for me. For goodness' sake, Mother, don't look as if you expected something dreadful! I'm only going to the tea-room dance with Mrs. Hartwell and the crowd. Cecilia, will you see if I dropped my gloves on the stairs? Oh, there they are. Good-bye, Mother."

"Good-bye," said the mother once more, rising herself from a half-eaten breakfast to make the sandwiches for Cecilia, and find Jack's arithmetic in the struggle to get him off for school, before going back to clear off the breakfast table. Her heart had sunk at Lily's words; it was not only that she seemed to have no thought for her home in the exigencies of music lessons and the fox trot, but there was that haunting fear—the tea-room dance was all right, of course, but if she was meeting Rupert Yarde this way, why, then—

"You go and sit by the window with the paper; it's such a pretty morning! I'll clear the things away," said Cousin Lizzie kindly. "Farnham was remarking before you were down, dear, that you did entirely too much—you must remember what the doctor said—and you know how glad I always am to help. Dear me, how careless Ellen is! Here is another cup nicked. She should be spoken to."

"Oh, dear! I suppose so," said Mrs. Irving helplessly.

"But that wasn't what I wanted to tell you about, Marla." Cousin Lizzie stood still with a trayful of spoons and forks in her hands. Her blue eyes looked

straight before her—Cousin Lizzie was white-haired and elderly, but her eyes were still very blue; her voice trembled. “It’s about Lily. You know, Marla, how I have loved that child—my godchild and named Elizabeth after me! When she was a little thing she used to climb up in my arms and hug me tight and say: ‘I love you, sweet Lizzie!’ Of course I was away at Cora’s for a good many years, but I never forgot Lily’s birthday or Christmas. But ever since I came here, three months ago——” Cousin Lizzie’s voice broke into a sob; she sat down suddenly. “Just because I opened another letter of hers yesterday afternoon, addressed to Miss Elizabeth Irving—and I was wondering before I opened it what gentleman could be writing to me!—she was—— Well, I never heard such language from any one! She was *ungoverned*. And the letter was nothing at all, just ‘Will be there,’ and signed ‘R.’ Nothing would suit her but that I was a prying criminal. She insinuated that I wanted to read her letters; she wished that she had been named for anybody else; she——”

Mrs. Irving made an ejaculation of distress. “Lily shouldn’t have spoken like that; she is very quick-tempered, like her father, but it is soon over; not that I am excusing her at all, Cousin Lizzie. You know young girls do mind some things so much. Perhaps if, when letters come in a handwriting you don’t recognize, you would wait till Lily came home——”

“That is what I always do. No one can be more particular than I,” said Cousin Lizzie with dignity.

"Is there anything more you would like to have me do here, Marla?"

"Thank you, nothing more," said Mrs. Irving with outward calm, but deep inward resentment. She escaped upward.

Why did everyone come to her with all the disagreeable happenings? This was a fine beginning to the day, indeed; she felt weak before it had well started, with those other anxieties already gnawing at her—Farnham's troubles, so vitally a part of living, and, what struck deeper yet, this affair of Lily's. Mrs. Irving always arranged her own room; she stopped now, as always when she dusted, to look fondly at the photographs of the children when they were little. Lily had always been popular, but when Rann March suddenly appeared on the scene last winter the two had apparently fallen in love at sight. It couldn't "come to anything" for a long time, of course; but no one could help liking young March; he was not especially good-looking, but just the kind you felt was nice clear through—with a football record behind him, and clean, forthright ways.

And then for the last two months he had stopped coming to the house entirely! George Huff and Leonard Cray, negligible youths, were the favoured ones for a few weeks, and since then it had been Rupert Yarde exclusively. Rupert was somewhat older; handsome, if you liked the style, rather delicate, and with little effeminate ways; he had money. Mrs. Irving disliked him intensely; she

thought him vain. If he was meeting Lily oftener than she mentioned—

If only Cousin Lizzie hadn't told her about that letter! Mrs. Irving knew that it would be on her mind all day, and she really ought not to have to worry; anything that distressed her took just so much strength out of her. And if Farnham's "deal" didn't go through to-day, what would become of them?

A ring at the telephone called her from her agonized reflections.

"Is this Mrs. Irving? This is Mrs. Bush. How are you?—Well, really, I'm used up before the day begins, there's so much on one. I had a letter from Elsie this morning—I thought you'd like to know; they've been having the most wretched time South; all the children have been ill, and Alec cut his foot; they were afraid of blood poisoning, but it's all right now. She feels quite hurt at not hearing from you since they left, but I told her— Yes, yes, I see, of course. Well, to change the subject, I promised Mrs. Tevis—the Tevises are the new people next door, my dear—that I'd speak to you about Jack, for I was sure you wouldn't allow it if you knew—allow him, I mean, to use that sling shot on his way to school. He shoots at their chickens— Oh, yes, I've seen him! He killed a hen yesterday. Mrs. Tevis—she's a very nervous little woman—went all to pieces, thinking that he might have hit the baby; they had to send for the doctor. Mr. Tevis says sling shots are against the law. Yes—I knew you'd

see about it, dear. You are always so calm about everything! I often wish I had your temperament. Oh, Hilda has just come in. She wants to know if Lily is coming out by train to-night or in Rupert's motor—Hilda wants to meet her. Oh, I supposed you knew. Good-bye!"

Mrs. Irving sat down in the big chair by the window, quivering. The sky was very blue; the hills had taken on a soft, animated haze; the scarlet-leaved maple opposite gleamed like a jewelled tree in the sunlight. It all seemed to belong to a different country from the one in which she lived.

"Marla!"

She turned wearily. "Yes, Cousin Lizzie."

"That washerwoman has hung Cecilia's new blue cambric right in the sun, and it's all fading out; I thought you'd want to speak about it. I'll take those books back to the library for Lily, if you like; the walk is too long for you. They are weeks overdue. Let me see; there will be thirty-eight cents on this one and forty on the other; it's positively sinful."

"Yes, it is," agreed the mother painfully.

She counted out the money from her pocketbook. and, after going down to interview the laundress, she lay back once more in the comfortable chair, her pretty, languid hands crossed in her lap, her face, with its soft, light hair and gentle gray eyes, expressionless. She felt racked in spirit to a degree that affected her physically, as she knew too well! The doctor had said more than the family knew. How

could she ever get well with all this to stand? There was no one to take her place. And just when she couldn't stand anything—when she oughtn't to be called upon to stand another thing! And now she would have to nerve herself to confront Jack—

When Jack finally came in to luncheon he was unusually quiet.

She spoke with control: "Jack."

"Yes, Mother." He stopped in the doorway, cap in hand, his eyes turned away.

"Look at me! Look at me, I say! Give me your sling shot."

"It's broken."

"Very well; let it stay broken then. I didn't think you were a cruel boy, Jack, shooting at chickens—and killing them. You'll have to go to Mrs. Tevis—"

"That old hen of hers was dead when I shot at it—if that's what you mean!" Jack's voice had a hard, choked sound. "I'm going upstairs; I don't want any lunch."

"Not want any lunch! What's the matter? Why, Jack!" He had suddenly knelt down on the floor, plunging his head in her lap.

"I'm not—cruel. Rover"—Rover was the black dog at the corner—"was run over just now by Rupert Yarde's car, Mother! I saw Rover—I saw his legs—" A gasping description of the tragedy poured forth.

Her arms around the boy, Mrs. Irving tried warmly to comfort. "I wouldn't think of that part, you

know, dear; I'd only think that it doesn't hurt him now, and what a dear, lovely dog he was, and how happy you made him when you brought him bones. *I know you're not cruel! Didn't you say you needed a new tennis racket?"*

"Ye-es."

"Well, get it then," she said largely, on the strength of a hoarded five-dollar bill. "Now run upstairs and wash your face and hands. Here come Cecilia and Cousin Lizzie. What *is* the matter now?"

Well might she ask! Cecilia's pink-and-white frock, as well as one cheek and her light curls, was plastered with mud; her mouth was smeared to her chin with blood.

"Now don't be frightened," said Cousin Lizzie volubly; she herself looked white. "It is really nothing. What is a tooth compared with a life?"

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed the mother.

"You can imagine how I felt when I saw that dear child in front of the trolley and the motorman clanging his bell and everyone shrieking at her, and she so absent-minded that she never knew a thing! And a boy grabbed her, just as she slipped and fell against the wheel of the Tevises' baby carriage—that stupid nurse had it right in the way!—and knocked her upper front tooth right out."

"Oh, my goodness!" said Mrs. Irving again.

"And the postman—he was just passing—picked the tooth up and clapped it right back into place and told her to keep pressing it up and to take her straight

to the dentist on the way back, but I felt so shaky, dear, that——”

“Get Cousin Lizzie the ammonia from my dressing table, Jack,” said Mrs. Irving hastily. Heaven knew she felt shaky, too. A front tooth—and a little girl! Why hadn’t Cousin Lizzie got it attended to at once? It might be—oh, horrible thought!—too late now.

When she returned from the dentist’s she was still tense but partly reassured in this particular stress. The dentist said the tooth would probably be all right. Cousin Lizzie had gone to bed in a darkened room with a headache, but there was no rest for the mistress of the house. Ellen came up to say that the line had broken with the last of the wet clothes on it; the laundress refused to wash them out again, and now what was to be done about it? What indeed!

Every few minutes some additional small harassing need for decision or guidance evolved, bringing her, under her quiet and dignified demeanour, an absolutely despairing sense of its all being really too much for her; she must not have all this on her mind. She wished Farnham hadn’t told her how dreadfully much depended on to-day’s transactions; if that deal didn’t go through—— What use for her to take her medicine so carefully, and sit on the porch with her feet up?

When the children came later to entertain Cecilia, even then—with everything else on her mind—she had constantly to keep them from disturbing Cousin

Lizzie. And as to Lily—— There was no use talking about it, the mother's instinctive perception forced on her the fact, of which she had tried to keep unconscious, that there was a mystery somewhere. Lily's tacit avoidance of her for the last month was proof that there was something that the girl didn't want to tell; every time that Mrs. Irving's eyes had rested on her beautiful child with anxious questioning the beautiful child had turned away, her mouth set enigmatically.

Of course Lily felt that her mother wasn't in sympathy with her about Rupert. It made the mother feel sick all over every time she thought of Lily's marrying him. Was it possible—could it be possible—that she would marry him without telling any one first? Suppose she was going to marry him to-day! The letter that Cousin Lizzie had opened—suppose that was what it had meant? Mrs. Irving sat up straight with a hand on her strangely sinking heart; it seemed to be stopping its beats. No, no, that couldn't be; Lily would never stab her like that—never! Still—— Well, if Lily married Rupert, she herself would die. Lily would feel badly then!

She turned suddenly, with a start of awakening, at a voice behind her:

“You look so comfortable there I hate to disturb you. Don't get up! I'll bring a chair over.” The speaker, a slight woman in black, with a modest hat, and a small, gold cross pendent to her waist by a black ribbon, had come up the steps at the side. She

had brown hair and brown eyes and a very sweet, almost roguish smile.

"Oh, Mrs. Rayne! I'm glad to see you; you haven't been here in ages."

"I should think you'd be glad I hadn't," said the other, taking out a little book with a pencil attached. "I always come to ask you for something for my Girls' Lodging Hall; and there are so many needs now!"

"I can give you only a dollar," said Mrs. Irving languidly, taking her pocketbook from the bag on the arm of her chair and proffering to her visitor a solitary, crumpled bill which she could ill spare.

"A dollar is a good deal," said Mrs. Rayne gladly. "Thank you ever so much! I haven't collected much this afternoon. Some people were out, and most feel there are so many expenses in the autumn. Business is so dull, too."

"Yes, indeed."

"I see the Harkness children are here, poor little things! I stopped at the house just now—such a beautiful house, isn't it?—and Miss Wickes, one of the trained nurses, came down for a minute to say that Mrs. Harkness wasn't any better; it's her nerves, you know. Neither her husband nor the children have seen her for more than five minutes a day for six weeks. Miss Wickes says she is so sorry for him; he seems so discouraged."

"She is fortunate to be able to take a rest. You can't do anything without your health," said Mrs. Irving deeply.

The visitor looked straight before her; for the

moment she said nothing. She had naturally an impulsive spirit that hurled her, unless she was careful, into intemperate speech. There were, heaven knew, enough cases of disabling illness! But the phrase "You can't do anything without your health" always moved her hotly to combat; she knew of so many people who did do so very much without it! Why, most of the great work of the world had been accomplished by men and women handicapped by physical weakness or recurring ailment. Even she herself, if you came down to that, in her own little daily round—— But she swiftly quenched the personal thought with its rising antagonism.

"I suppose very few women out of their teens really feel well all the time," she hazarded soberly. She turned her kind gaze on her hostess. "And how are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right," said Mrs. Irving hardily, but with mist over the eyes that met the others. "Of course the care of a house and family does wear on one's nerves; sometimes I feel as if I'd go wild with all the demands on me. The problems are so never-ending! Very often I think that if everything went smoothly for just one day even, I wouldn't know how to take it."

"Yes, it is trying," said Mrs. Rayne with sympathy; if people felt that they needed pity, then they did need it. Her own husband and child had died so long ago that nobody remembered those dearest ones but herself. The people who unloaded their troubles on her never seemed to think that she was

alone and poor, and lived in one little room and worked, rain or shine, for her living—but then, of course, she didn't *want* any pity! Before she left she told an absurd story about one of her girls to Mrs. Irving; they both laughed over it.

Mrs. Irving sat gazing after her as she went down the street; something about Mrs. Rayne always soothed and cheered.

A shriek brought Mrs. Irving staggering to her feet. She was sure that Cecilia had knocked out that tooth once more, but it proved to be only Jack, completely spoiling all the doll-playing fun of the little girls. He had to be corralled and reproved and brought in sullenly to study his lessons.

When Cousin Lizzie came down, still upset from shock, she had a harrowing letter, brought by the last mail, from her niece Gertrude; the doctor said Gertrude needed change. Mrs. Irving felt that she could not offer the opportunity, yet she tried wearily to be helpful in some way, with that queer sinking feeling growing in her.

If Lily only would come home, and she could look into the girl's face and see that everything was still the same!

But it was Vane who came first, her tall, dark-eyed eldest. She could see him swinging along far down the street, getting nearer and nearer, and was struck by the fact that he was growing to look much older; he had a masterful air. He greeted her gravely as he came in, and Cousin Lizzie to the same effect, and went straight on upstairs.

In a few moments the mother—anxious, she knew not why—went up, too; she had reached her own room when he called her.

“Mother, will you come in here a moment? Sit down; you look tired.” He placed the chair for her, and closed the door before he came to stand in front of her. “I’ve got something I want to say—— By the way, if you think Jack’s studying his lessons when you send him upstairs you’re much mistaken; he reads ‘The Three Midshipmen’ instead. If he takes my best neckties, as he’s been doing, he’ll get a good thrashing.”

“Oh, Vane!”

“But that isn’t what I want to speak about; there’s something else.” He squared himself, his eyes looking resolutely down at her, his jaws set, though his voice was even. “I can’t stand this breakfast racket any more, Mother; it puts me all on edge for the day. If I choose to stay in bed half an hour longer—sometimes I don’t get to sleep very early—and go off without my breakfast, it’s got to be my own lookout.”

“But, Vane! When you don’t consider your father’s wishes——”

“Dad doesn’t mind half as much as you think he does—not half so much as you do, Mother. He knows I’m old enough to know what I want to do. You don’t realize it, Mother, but you get in such a state that it upsets everyone; you look so agonized! If you’re going to mind every little thing like that, I’ll have to go and live somewhere else.” He smiled,

but his tone was serious enough. "Honest, I will."

"Oh, it will be all right after this," said the mother. She rose unsteadily. "I've got to leave you now."

She walked back to her own room and stood leaning for a moment against the dressing table. Everything had gone black before her. This was the worst; Jack deceiving her, the brothers quarrelling, Vane wanting to leave—

Her heart beat strangely, and she went, half blindly, for her medicine; her very fingertips seemed to be dizzy, but she managed to pour it out carefully, groping her way afterward to sit down on the edge of the bed, pushing aside a newspaper.

The room became wrapped in gathering dusk; the outlines of the furniture were fading out; it was like being in a tomb. She felt quite collectedly—in spite of this queer goneness, as if life were slowly oozing away—that she could stand no more sapping anxieties, no more nerve-racking grievances, little or big. Those around her would have to be made to understand that they must keep their difficulties to themselves, they must get along the best they could without her help; they must be made to understand that any further strain of this kind now, would—not figuratively, but literally—kill her.

She rose after awhile with effort, lit the gas, and sat down limply once more, her eyes falling unconsciously on the newspaper beside her. Yes, that was what Farnham had been reading aloud this morning. The words said then came back to her:

“He was a brave man to stay at his post.”

“That was his job.”

No deed of courage ends with the perpetrator of it; known or unknown, it swells a great Living Force. Some strong electric current went through Mrs. Irving’s veins; she sat up straight, with a strangely awakened sensation. She had naturally a certain downright faculty of facing things fairly; it held her now. Suppose being an effectual wife and mother did kill her—what of that? It was her job, there was no getting around that—the job that she had herself undertaken—to be a wife and mother and householder. That was her job. If it killed her it would be at her post!

She thought suddenly with a pitying horror of that poor woman down the street, who now could see neither husband nor children, her nerves and will-power gone beyond control, lapped around with every comfort into her writhing self, with a nullification of every joy, as well as care. To be like that, to have everything kept from her—not to be the centre of the home; not to know what her dearest ones were wanting or thinking or feeling; nay, to have others know when she didn’t—why, that in itself would be a living death! As long as she was alive here on earth must her spirit and her heart be passionately alive to those she loved. A torrent of love for them seemed to overflow her, touchingly eager and yearning and hopeful. Why this high note of tragedy that she had been sustaining? Suppose Farnham had bad news to-night, poor fellow—well,

that was a lot better than his being ill! Suppose Lily—she winced then!—wanted to marry Rupert; there was really nothing wrong about him, so far as the mother knew; it was only her own dislike and prejudice. If Lily were glad, she would have to be! As for Cousin Lizzie and Lily—she would manage to get the mail herself before Cousin Lizzie sorted it, and put one source of woe out of the way.

She found herself unaccountably smiling. Strange, that the square facing of one's dread, the steady acceptance—if it had to be, though it wasn't going to be!—should bring her a sense of odd and deep elation. She was still sitting there smiling when her husband came in; he did not see her until she turned; he looked very worn and tired.

“Why, Marla!” he said gently. He came and sat down on the edge of the bed beside her. It seemed to her that he eyed her queerly. “How sweet you look to-night!”

“Did the deal go through?”

He shook his head. “No, but we'll pull out after a while some way; this European war has set everything back. I tell you, I felt pretty discouraged as I came along to-night, wondering how we were going to manage, but when I saw you here smiling, something came over me—— There are lots of worse things in the world than poverty, aren't there, old sweetheart?”

“Oh, lots!” she whispered.

“Only you mustn't do too much; that's the only thing that bothers me; you're not strong enough;

you've got to be careful. I don't see how you can do without Ellen, I really don't; but——”

“Well, we won't think of that until we've had some dinner,” said his wife fondly. “Have you seen Cecilia?” She began recounting the events of the day.

Lily was late; but at any rate she came! The dinner took on an unexpected air of festivity, no one exactly knew why; everyone seemed unusually kind and cheerful. Vane got a footstool for his mother with a playfully admiring remark about her frivolous shoes; Cecilia jumped up twice to kiss her.

Jack said: “You look awful pretty to-night, Mother!” It came out that he was going to a ball game with Vane on the morrow.

Cousin Lizzie promised to make a delightful dessert, a real Irving delicacy of which Lily was particularly fond.

Only Lily sat without speaking, her eyes watchful. But at any rate she was there—how foolish and unnecessary all the mother's vain imaginings!

But after dinner, when she was alone again, lying down in her own room, Lily appeared. She drew a chair up beside the bed, her face filled with new animation.

“Well, I don't know what came over us to-night!” she burst out. “Mother, we've all been deciding something just now: You've got to have your breakfast in bed after this, for a while.”

“No, no! Please not!” besought the mother. “I want to be down with the rest of you. I——”

“Well, you’re not going to—for a while, anyway; that’s settled! Father was telling us about things. I’m going to stop the music lessons till after Christmas, my voice needs a rest anyway; and Cousin Lizzie and I are going to do the work while she’s here. She says it drives her crazy sitting around doing nothing. I know I can learn to cook a thousand times more economically than Ellen. And Jack and Cecilia will help wash dishes. Vane says you’ve *got* to be taken care of, Mother—he is going to buy some of the things for us cheaper and bring them out from town. Father is so pleased; I think he has been through a lot! Now, Mother dear, I know all that you’re going to say; you’re just the most self-willed person I ever knew, but this time you’ve got to think of *us*. You’ve just got to do as we say and be careful; we couldn’t, we just *couldn’t* do without you!”

“Why, Lily!”

“And, Mother”—Lily’s face suddenly flushed and her eyes shone—“there’s something else—I really wanted to speak about it before, but you looked so distressed and worried all the time—you don’t know how hard you take things, Mother; we never know what you are going to get worked up over next—I meant to tell you anyway next week; but there’s something about you to-night, Mother—you look so sweet. It’s—Rupert and——”

“Yes, dearest,” said the Mother steadily.

“Well, I’ve been going with him so much lately because I wanted to see—he was perfectly fine about

it; he was willing to take it at that—you don't like him, Mother, but he really is nice!— You see, I wasn't sure whether I really loved Rann, and we agreed not to meet at all, or even write, for two months, and if either of us liked any one else better—perhaps it was silly of me, but I wanted it that way — And oh, Mother, the time is up Saturday! That was his note Cousin Lizzie opened, and it's been such ages! But I know now—oh, I know now—that it never could be any one but Rann. I can't even say it to you, Mother, but——” Her arms were tight around the mother, her face hidden.

“Why, my own darling child!” said Mrs. Irving.

TWO AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STORIES



THE MAN WHO WENT UNDER
AS TOLD TO
M. S. C.

I HAVE been called an embezzler—and to be an embezzler has, on the face of it, an ugly sound; sympathy is alienated at the start. Yet as a matter of fact, most men step, on occasion, over the barrier that separates them from dishonesty; they may scramble back at once, but at some time in their lives they do step over. . . . I haven't found myself, when all is said and done, very different from the men who will read this. Mine hasn't been one of the large pyrotechnical careers.

As a boy, in the sixties, I lived in a small town—it would be a suburb in these days—near the city. I was an only child, and my mother was very proud of my looks—I was what is called a “pretty boy”—and of my polite manners. At home I was always quiet and obedient, and greeted visitors, as I often overheard them say, “like a little gentleman.” But my character was, even at that early age, contradictory. My mother, who was delicate, disliked the noise of children around the place, and in the houses and yards of other boys, where I mostly spent my time out of school, I was both louder and rougher than

at home, and I was also more ingenious in evading the law than my playmates. I was one with half a dozen others who set fire to an unused barn, and nearly burned down a whole row of houses, the wind rising unduly high; and I secretly indulged in the practice of throwing stones at windows, at horses, and the persons of such children as I could attack in this way from behind a tree. I once, to my fright, nearly killed a boy by stretching a wire across the sidewalk in the path of his bicycle, which he had refused to let me ride—they were high bicycles in those days—but I was seldom found out.

When I was haled up before my mother, as sometimes happened in spite of all the wariness in which I had become an adept, she, the gentlest of women, at once hotly took my side, and was furious at the accuser, giving her own version of the story afterward to my father, who always agreed with her.

He was both a pompous and indolent man, who disliked to take any more responsibility than he had to. If the complaint was made to him personally, he received it with dignified surprise and displeasure; I was called in and my invariable disclaimer offered in lofty and conclusive rebuttal of all evidence. Nothing was ever probed into, confession never demanded of me, even with half a dozen witnesses against me—though the gaps and rents in my defense must sometimes have made themselves apparent to all but the most wilfully blind of parents. Their own self-love was wounded in any criticism of their son.

I found it almost impossible, when passing a child

who was much smaller than I, not to slyly pinch or kick it. I did not mean to be cruel, it was a teasing propensity, such as most boys have. But when the bigger boys laid hold of me that way sometimes, I would howl and shriek for mercy, sneaking out of their way afterward.

There was one, Jake Patton by name, only a year or two older than I—I was then fourteen—but very much larger and heavier. He used to lay in wait for me when I went to school, and jumping on me pull me down on the ground, rub my face unmercifully in the ice and snow, and then tweak my head back and stuff the snow in my mouth and nostrils, releasing me only after I was half blind and staggering with rage and fear. I did not dare to complain to my parents, knowing that I would get it ten times worse from my enemy afterward if they interfered. But one day my teacher, a pretty, spirited little thing, met me coming in at the door, my arm over my eyes, sobbing, and she got the whole truth from me.

“But why don’t you try to stop him?” she asked, her eyes flashing. She had drawn me into an empty classroom. “*I’d* stop it! Why don’t you fight him?”

“Oh, I wish I could!” I groaned, “but I can’t; he’s twice as strong as I am.”

“*I’d* give him something to remember, even if I couldn’t beat him. *I’d fight!*” she said. Her red lips trembled, but her dark eyes were dauntless. Somehow she looked to me perfectly beautiful. . . . Then she laughed, and said repentantly:

“Goodness, I oughtn’t to talk this way to you!”

But the words she said kept repeating themselves over to me like a strain of music: “I’d fight!” Little and slight as that girl-teacher was, *she* wouldn’t have crawled out of anything; she’d stand up and face odds. It was the glimpse of another world.

For two days Jake was not at his post; then I saw him, too late to turn back. My heart sank, my flesh crawled, I was more afraid than I had ever been. But as he called out:

“Come on, Ern, you sneak, and take what I’m going to give you!” I saw that he had even easier prey, a little chubby boy of six or seven, whom I liked, and whose ears I had pulled and whose fat legs I had kicked myself, more than once, smiling at his squeals. Jake was no ruffian, but when little Tommy rose from the snow in which he had been rolled, and ran off with distorted face, crying, while Jake laughed, something unforeseen, something strangely different and greater than I, rose in me—I have said that my nature is contradictory. I forgot that I was small and weak, and I hurled myself on him furiously, shouting, “Don’t you ever touch Tommy again!” We grappled; he hit me, but I hit him; we went at it hot and heavy. I felt a strength that is a joy to remember, the strength of fighting in the open, and for a good cause. In the very midst of it, however, we heard a horrified “Stop—Stop! Boys, stop this wicked fighting at once!” Deacon Gulger pulled us apart, and gave us a severe lecture.

But Jake never bullied me again after this. He said: "Why, old chap, I never supposed you had it in you!" and we became friends.

For a little while after that I felt in me a new self-respect, the knowledge of the joy of facing the worst—

I have sometimes thought since, oddly enough, that if I could have fought that fight out some higher spirit in me might have been set free. . . .

One other incident stands out in this part of my history. At a crowded church fair I picked up a ten-dollar bill in the lobby and stuffed it in my pocket, filled with exhilaration and excitement at my luck. Shortly afterward I heard that the pretty young school-teacher, of whom I have spoken, had lost a ten-dollar bill.

I never could clearly explain to myself why I didn't return the money at once—something in my excitement seemed to hold me back from action. I listened to her laments; I watched the search of the floor by others; I even joined in it eagerly, in a vague idea that it might not be *her* bill which I had found. A strange inertia began to steal over me; there appeared to be a panel slid across my mind which hid the reasoning side of it from use; the money in my pocket seemed to be really mine, and to have no connection with the girl's loss.

But that night I awoke suddenly in the dark as if a cold hand had been laid on me—that panel in my mind had been drawn back and a troop of horrible, accusing thoughts poured forth and terrified me. I

had deliberately stolen that bill—pretty Miss Nannie's tearful eyes wrenched my soul. I trembled and wept, myself, with horror at my deed, and vowed that I would give her back the money the first thing in the morning. Yet I did not. When morning came, the terrifying impressions of the night had vanished entirely. The money was mine—I had found it; I saw that it would be impossible to make restitution now without having unpleasant questions asked. I was unusually good in school that day, and won Miss Nannie's grateful praise.

I speak of this incident, because, though it occurred more than forty years ago, I have, strangely enough, never been able to forget it; at the oddest times it has recurred to me as vividly as when it happened, with that same poignant remorse. I do not believe my case at all singular. All childhood commits petty sins to which the tender mind gives pricking remorse; the best men, even, have small debts long ago incurred, small trusts miscarried, small dishonest occasions, so to speak, that always, through all the years, cannot change their shape, but, in spite of reason, remain ever the same. . . . Fifteen years after, I sent a cheque for a hundred dollars, when I could not really afford it, to Miss Nannie—whom I had heard of as poor and an invalid—in remembrance of her kindness to me when a lad—but it was returned—Miss Nannie had died the week before. The news unaccountably disturbed me for awhile.

I had always been brought up to a particularly

strict observance of the Sabbath Day, even when it was the general rule, and the present laxities were not thought of. I became, at seventeen, a member of the church. My experience of religion was sincere and deep, and in all the following chances and changes of my life that religion was my consolation and my mainstay. I have been called a hypocrite, and nothing could be farther from the truth to my own consciousness. I often erred—who has not? But I could always lay my sins at the feet of my Saviour, and rise forgiven. In my more prosperous years it was one of my most grateful pleasures to give liberally to the church and to missions; from a lad, I was constant in my attendance at service, leading often in prayer, and setting, as our pastor said, a needed example to other young men. It was one of the crosses of my later life that my own son remained deaf to the Heavenly Call.

I began my business life early, in a large bank in the city. A runner at first, I was gradually promoted. I neither drank, smoked, nor played cards. I paid close and intelligent attention to my work. I had a cheerful manner, an agreeable face (I am told), and blue eyes that met the gaze steadily and squarely; it is a habit that has always been mine.

I made many friends, and was one of the most popular men in the bank. My few private pecuniary irregularities were entirely my own affair, and the natural outcome of circumstances. As the treasurer of the Sunday School, for instance, I considered that I had a right temporarily to use the

funds entrusted to me in those instances in which ready cash was an object. Once, indeed, a shortage was accidentally discovered, but I secretly raised the money and offered it as a gift to make the account good. As it happened, another young fellow was suspected, and my generosity much praised. I begged that he should not be accused, defending him, and urging my own greater care for the future. He found this out in some way, and never liked me afterward. The sneering attitude he took wounded me, and our friendship ceased, although as a Christian I cherished no hard feelings toward him.

When I was twenty-eight I had been receiving teller of the bank for a year; and my wedding day was set to one of the sweetest girls in the world.

II

FOR some months before my marriage I had cautiously availed myself of the opportunity which my position in the bank gave for private financing.

Money passed into my hands daily from which I soon saw that one might easily borrow to further his own fortunes; with, of course, the strict promise to himself of replacing what was taken. There were ways of changing an entry—about which there is no need to go into detail—which have been practised successfully many times before and since, and which, if executed with unvarying care, reduced the chance of detection to a minimum. Besides, I was a popular and trusted employee, my honesty beyond question. I inaugurated a system of my own, placing the sums

at my disposal from time to time with a broker who bought stocks for me, and who was supposed not to know that I was in a bank.

Like many young men, I had a great deal of imagination. The first time I took a couple of hundred dollars from the pile before me it seemed to be entirely the result of a natural sequence. I thought:—I will take this chance.—No, I will not.—Yes, I will.—Why shouldn't I? There seemed no reasoning power to deter me. I felt the same exhilaration and excitement which had possessed me when I kept Miss Nannie's ten-dollar bill, added to a cool keenness of intention. The next day my broker bought for me; and with the proverbial luck of the beginner, my stock rose. Afterward, I kept on cautiously venturing, with the same success. I considered then, as I do now, that my methods were not very different from those employed by most business men. I had occasional nights, indeed, when the panel in my mind slid back, as it had long ago, to let those other, accusing thoughts pour forth; but morning brought saner counsel. I was supposed to have inherited a small sum from my parents—though the contrary was the case—so that it occasioned no surprise when in view of my approaching marriage I bought, on easy payments, a good house on the outskirts of the city.

But two weeks before Marian and I were married luck began to go heavily against me; the market took a slump which threw many into a panic besides myself; what I went through was something awful.

Bank examinations were not so strict thirty odd years ago as they are now, and I had always, warned by some sixth sense, managed to cover my tracks before the examiners, unheralded, appeared. But now I lived in daily fear that the shortage would be found out, and I arrested.

Everyone laid my haggard appearance to the score of health. I had, indeed, a frightful cold, and the president himself, Mr. Woodley, urged me to greater care.

Three days before my wedding I was obliged to take a plunge which it makes my hair stand on end now to think of. It seemed as if every face I saw looked on me in suspicion. I took my troubles to my Maker; I prayed as I had never done before that this effort might be successful, vowing that I would never, never take such a chance again. I believed that He would hear me and help me—it was the prayer of faith! And although the venture did mercifully succeed, every day of the ten days of our wedding journey, in the midst of my happiness, there were horrible moments when I felt that something would be found out in my absence, and I broke into a cold sweat with the certainty that the iron hand of the law would be laid on me as soon as we returned.

I may be blamed for marrying Marian under these conditions, with the chance of dragging her in to share immediate disgrace; but, as ever in such cases, only one half of my mind, that half that was occupied with what I strongly desired, seemed to be in

working order, and I refused to face any consequences which I did not have to. I dreaded nothing more than to have that sliding panel withdrawn.

When I did come back and found no suspicions raised against me, I felt justified in having taken the risk, and my thanksgiving to an ever-watchful Providence was deep and sincere. I fully intended to give up my private schemes for the future.

But circumstances were too strong for me. There were payments to be made on the house; my darling son Ernest was born; Marian had a long and expensive illness; two little girls succeeded the boy; I found it more and more expensive to support a family. When I gained, I couldn't help chancing further, and when I lost I was forced to venture largely against my will. My salary at that time was a beggarly twenty-five hundred a year.

But, as time went on, the game I was forced to play began to tell on me. Most business men, particularly those who seem to the outsider to be on an assured and prosperous basis, live, themselves, in an uncertain state from day to day, always engaged in half surmounting an endless chain of difficulties which stretch ahead to imperil the way at every step. For all I worked so hard, the money I gained never seemed to be enough to do any real good. When I was "flush," I had to remember to spend the money cautiously; it would never do for a bank clerk to be prominently extravagant; but as a rule, I was always getting out of one hole into another.

Marian knew nothing of money, and little of my

affairs; she never questioned me about them, taking what I gave her and asking for more if it was needed. Sometimes I had odd moments—I have spoken of my contradictory nature—of wishing that she *would* question me and insist on knowing just where we stood, and help me stem this whelming tide. She had no surprise when I authorized some large expenditure after a month of scarceness—“business” was a man’s province. There was no sweeter woman than Marian, her trust in me was implicit; everything that I did was right to her, and she was particularly proud of my honesty and religious uprightness.

With my friends—and I had many apparently—I was always conscious, down below everything, of something that separated me from them. In my most jovial moments there was a never-sleeping sense of caution. The one exception to this was my enemy of old days, my friend ever since our encounter—Jake Patton. I had seen him but seldom since our boyhood—he had become a partner in a large firm while I was still an humble bank-clerk. But when we ran across each other there was something in the heartiness of his greeting different from that which I received from any one else, and another spirit in me rose to meet it. His invariable:

“Well, old fellow, been engaged in any fights lately? What soulless corporation are you battering your fool head against now?” Made me feel for a little while as if I were really brave, as if I *could* fight against the conditions and desires that were

dragging me down. I had, sometimes, in his presence, that unexpected, almost overpowering impulse to confession which has come over me at the oddest seasons; the words:

“You do not know what I am, but I am going to tell you. I have been taking money from the bank,” seemed as if they would force themselves from my closed lips. After the danger was over, I would become literally unnerved, and find myself with trembling lips and shaking limbs and a devout thankfulness that I hadn’t yielded to the weakness. The thought haunted me that I might tell someone before I knew it, and find myself lodged in prison and in stripes. Perhaps if I had seen more of Jake, or. . . .

There was, among the people I knew, a certain poor young priest with whom I had been associated some years before in trying to get a charity patient into a hospital. I often met him in going through certain streets; we exchanged a word of greeting as we passed. I cannot describe him adequately or his effect on me. His bearing, the firm, sweet lines of his mouth, his glance—in which there was a heavenly simplicity and kindness—affected me strangely. I was not the only one whom he thus attracted—little children ran up to him at his smile; people who went by turned back to gaze again with a surprised, softened look. When I found myself nearing him a tremor seemed to run through me—I wished, yet feared to hear that gentle greeting, to feel those eyes fixed on me; I longed for the moment,

unmeasurably, to be something different from what I was—I felt a sudden unexplainable horror of myself.

There came a day when I could not stand meeting him any longer—I turned aside. I said to myself: Some day I will go to him and talk to him—And then I heard that he was dead. If he had lived—if I had gone to him. . . .

I went on in that way for nineteen years. I could never take a vacation, the price of safety was in constant vigilance. In lieu of promotion, my salary had been raised to three thousand dollars.

Our children were all that Marian and I could wish; Ernest, my handsome boy, was the pride of my heart. But for the last few years luck, in spite of all my efforts, had gone against me. At the end of this time, strange as it may seem, I not only owed the bank more than a hundred thousand dollars, but I owed everyone else, too. Marian had accounts everywhere; I speculated more and more heavily, only to lose and lose. What I went through in this time nobody will ever know. Only my religious convictions sustained me.

III

WHILE many banks had changed materially in the conduct of their affairs, ours remained approximately the same. I couldn't help wondering sometimes both why I was not found out, and at a sort of laxness that seemed to be coming into the management. Mr. Woodley, the president, was growing old;

his hand shook as he signed his name. His son-in-law, young Lessner, had been appointed cashier in the place that I should have had— Once I had a horrible scare; I fancied that Lessner had been set to spy on me. I fancied that he had found out something wrong in my books, one afternoon, when I returned for my keys and found him still there. His eye avoided mine when we next met.

In all these years, my religious life had been my mainstay and my inspiration. I still kept the Lord's Day with the utmost strictness, and obliged my family to do so in spite of the tendencies of the age. When I discovered Ernest once riding on a bicycle on a Sabbath afternoon I punished him severely for the only time in his life. I had perhaps an almost superstitious reverence for the command to keep the Sabbath holy; I felt that I could expect no help during the week if I neglected it, and that the wrath of the Lord descended on those who did.

My joy was in my church work; there, indeed, sinner that I was—and who is not? I could feel my humble service of some worth. I was superintendent of the Sunday School, and my Bible Class for young men achieved prominence. Young men, indeed, were my especial care. I made friends with them, prayed with them earnestly, and talked to them unceasingly on the temptations to which all lads are open. The duty of strict honesty was one of my most urgent themes. I can conscientiously say that my heart was in this work; it gave me a grateful glow, it drugged that accusing part of me to

rest. It is strange that though I made warm friends among the many boys I helped, I could never seem to reach my own boy in this way—he remained aloof.

I needed comfort sorely, for luck seemed to have deserted me for good. I lived on the edge of a precipice; my nights were frightful. But although I prayed now with agonized fervour and faith, my prayers remained unanswered.

I speculated frantically, under, as I hoped, the Divine direction. I still lost. Each day I said to myself, "How long can this thing last?" I became terribly thin and worn; I started when any one spoke to me. I would have given anything to stop my pecuniary operations, but I couldn't stop now.

One morning I awoke early from a bad dream to find my wife regarding me strangely.

"You say such queer things in your sleep, lately, Ernie," she said.

"What do I say?" I asked, fixing my eyes on her. Suddenly I felt that I would get this fearful load off my mind; I would tell her all.

"Oh, dreams are nothing. I'm so foolish; forget all about it, dear," she said hurriedly.

"No, I want to tell you something."

She changed colour. "Isabel is calling me," she said nervously, and left the room. When she came back, after some minutes, she made no allusion to the subject; but she did not look herself for several days. Once, after reading in the newspaper of some defalcation, she put her arms around my neck, with her face hidden, and said:

"Ernie, if you ever did anything wrong, it would kill me. It is my greatest joy that you are beyond reproach."

IV

I WELL remember the day when the crash came. By that time, what with being pinched for money, hounded by dunning letters and in constant danger of detection, the fear that possessed me was so terrible that it was only by those moments of respite in which nature mercifully dulls the mind, airholes at which the submerged comes up to breathe, that I was able to preserve my reason. I had lost so much of the bank's money that only an almost impossible coup could land me in safety. Yet I still clung to the cherished, desperate hope of it. I prayed in agony.

On this fateful morning, the day after the bank examiners had been there, I had gone down town for the first time in weeks with that strange, exaltedly sanguine state of mind that is sometimes more apt than foreboding to come before a great catastrophe. The bank examiner had left. I felt at ease, comforted, sure that my prayer was answered, that this day extraordinary good fortune was to be mine. I would be able to restore before night the funds that I had borrowed, and begin to lead a new life; I shed tears of thankfulness at the blessed assurance given me from on High. I entered the bank with a light heart.

As the day went on, however, I found a chill slowly creeping over me. There was a directors'

meeting, unusual in itself on a Saturday after the noon closing, and an unusually long session. As I stood over my books, pen in hand, working after hours, as often happened, with a couple of other clerks, suddenly the knowledge came to me, irrevocable, certain, that I was found out. I do not know how the knowledge forced itself on me, but I knew it to be a fact, the result of a sub-consciousness which could not be defied; all else was delusion. I watched the door of the directors' room. Once it opened suddenly, someone came out, and passing down the aisle, looked at me. In that look I saw. . . .

I kept working on, dizzily, seeing nothing in the page before me, waiting for the summons to come. When it did not, I put on my hat and coat and went out.

It was in December, a few days before Christmas. Though only four o'clock, it was already growing dark; the streets were black with mud, yet slippery with a growing iciness. Lights were hazily dimmed in an encroaching fog. I wandered at first aimlessly in a confusion of mind that was in itself a horror—after a while I found myself before the Central Station. Yes, that was it—I must go off at once, while I was yet free. Free? I felt in my pocket; I had just two dollars in the world; my feet were already bound. And my wife and children—how about them?

It was half-past ten when I finally reached home. Marian started back when she saw me.

"Why, Ernie," she said. She put up her hand as if to ward off a blow—— We stood and looked at each other. When she spoke it was with pale lips to ask: "Are you ill?"

"No, I'm all right."

"Mr. Patton is in the library; he has been waiting impatiently for you for more than an hour."

"Very well," I said shortly, striding in there at once, with a quick sense of respite. We were both interested in a Christmas entertainment for newsboys—— After all, everything seemed as before; my imagination might have played me false.

He was pacing the room as I entered, but hitched his chair close up to mine after our greeting. I realized suddenly that there was something strange in his manner. Jake was a big man with a large head, grizzled hair and direct eyes. I saw my own figure reflected in the glass opposite, painfully thin, with bent shoulders and nearly white locks, though I was barely fifty.

He said: "Ern, I may as well go straight to the point. It was discovered to-day that you've been robbing the bank for years."

It had come at last. "My God!" I said, and crumpled up in my chair as if the spoken words had hit me like a stone.

He averted his eyes for a moment before going on.

"Suspicion was aroused a couple of weeks ago. The cash was examined to-day——part of it as you know was deposited in a couple of other banks—and it

was found that it did not tally with the entries to an enormous amount. The securities won't cover it, the directors themselves will have to make the loss good. You will be arrested on Monday. Johnson told me this—he was very much cut up. You were the least suspected man in the place."

My lips, my hands, something in my very soul seemed twisted out of shape. I burst forth gaspingly:

"I couldn't help it, Jake! I got in wrong from the first—I've tried and tried to pay back what I took. I've suffered the tortures of hell! If I'd only had a little luck——"

He stopped me. "Excuses aren't any good now. But I've not come to score you, Hollins—God knows we're none of us too honest! I've always liked you. Somehow it goes hard with me to think that we've been boys together and I'll be free while you're clapped into prison. Have you got any money?"

"Money!" I said, "Money!" I laughed, with a laugh that turned into a shriek. I felt suddenly beside myself. I took the loose change from my pocket and threw it on the table.

"Yes, I've got this!—if I had any money, do you suppose I'd be here now, cornered like a rat in a trap? Do you think I want to rot in jail? Do you think——"

"Hush, hush!" said Jake hurriedly. He went on and closed the door, and then came and bent over me.

"Ern, for the sake of old times, I'm going to help

you get off to Canada." He drew out of his pocket a wad of bills and thrust them into my grasp. "Here's five hundred. Pack your bag, take a cab, and catch a midnight train. It's your only chance."

"Jake, I'll never forget this," I babbled. "I'll never—I'll never forget it—" I began to sob, the relief was so great. I rose and then stopped short, struck by a sudden terrible thought, and then sank back clutching the chair. I fell to trembling violently, as I knew that what had seemed this heaven-sent escape was inexorably cut off from me.

"Oh, Jake!" I moaned, "I can't go. O Lord have mercy, help me to withstand temptation! Jake, Jake, I can't go!"

"For heaven's sake, pull yourself together," he adjured me, alarmed. "What's the matter?"

I threw up my arms.

"Don't you see? I can't go to-night; I'll *have* to wait until Monday, even if it's too late! To-morrow is *Sunday*!"

He stared at me.

"Well, what of it?"

"Jake, I've never travelled on Sunday in my life—I daren't go against my conscience now. The Lord would never bless me if I did."

"Why, you blaspheming old hypocrite!" said Jake incredulously, with a contempt before which I shrank. He controlled himself. "Here, I've offered to get you off, and I'll abide by it."

"I tell you, I can't go," I persisted wildly.

"All right, I'll leave the money. Your rotten

conscience may let up on you by morning. Good-night!"

He left me feebly protesting. Providence spared me the necessity of further decision. An attack of vertigo, such as I have been subject to ever since, laid me low the next day.

On Monday morning early I slipped out of the house. I was looking down the street while I descended the steps; as I reached the pavement someone from behind tapped me on the shoulder. I shall never forget that moment; my heart stood still suddenly. A horrible cold tingling thrill ran through me unlike anything I had ever experienced before. I seemed to become all at once a criminal—I!—Two men had been waiting there to arrest me. I was put in a cab and hurried off—

It seems strange and almost unbelievable that what followed made so little impression upon me. I grew increasingly dazed and confused—the scenes and incidents of the day passed before me like a dream, which I had imagined many times before more realistically. Only the feeling of that tap on my shoulder has remained—such a slight thing, over in an instant—to haunt me with its dread suggestion. In all the years since there have been times when I have felt it as vividly as in that first moment; I start even now, in sudden, uncontrollable terror, if any one touches my arm unexpectedly. It is the little things often that have the most tenacious power of torment—

I was finally committed to the prison where I was

to await trial. I sent word to my wife later, and the papers were full of my delinquency and arrest the next day, with my picture to head a column.

You may think it strange, but for the first time in many years I felt comparative relief. I had nothing to hide any more. I sat there in that prison cell, lethargic, but at peace. My wife was ill for the two weeks I was in jail and could not come to me, though I had several loving notes from her. I sent her the money Jake had left with me.

I wondered painfully what effect my future imprisonment would have on my two elder girls, just growing up, and on my boy. But above all things I yearned to make a full confession to Marian; to cleanse my soul of all I had been harbouring in it for so many years, to tell her all I had suffered, to feel her one with me in my better resolves; to make her understand . . . I had been alone for so many years!

After all, she was spared the worst—I was never brought to trial; greater interests than mine were at stake, with influence to hush up the matter. It was not only my imagination that had shown Lessner, the president's son-in-law, with the same expression as my own—he had followed in my tracks. If the president himself had been honest, matters in the state they were could never have run on so long—the whole edifice was corrupt, as was the edifice of my boyhood's home, though it was only whispered by those who knew. I was let out on bail, furnished secretly to the ostensible bondsmen. I was forbid-

den to leave the jurisdiction of the city; I might be brought to trial at any moment.

When I went home eagerly to Marian, she was convalescent. She sat up in bed and put her arm around me, murmuring brokenly as I laid my wet cheek against hers:

“Poor boy! What you must have suffered under all these dreadful suspicions! It has nearly killed me. But you knew all the time that your wife would never believe you were a thief—— I would not believe it *even if you confessed it yourself*. We will never speak of it again.”

I cannot describe to you what prop seemed to have given way under me. I had never had much sense of humour, but I laughed more than once. My youngest girl, Flossy, came and stood by me, frightened. “Why do you laugh like that, Daddy?” she asked.

I answered, “Oh, you always laugh when your tower of blocks tumbles down.”

It was a few days afterward that I overheard the Doctor talking to the nurse in another room.

“It’s a pity his wife hasn’t the courage to face his trouble with him.”

“He is guilty?”

“Undoubtedly—on his own statement, I hear. She can’t help knowing it. But she’ll never own it, and the poor devil will never get the help he needs, and might profit by now; I can see it in his face. Well! Give those powders. . . .”

It was true. That rectitude I had looked upon as

a bulwark in time of need in my wife was only another form of self-love——.

I must bring this confession to a close. For ten years the sentence of the court has hung over me. If I had been an embezzler of consequence, many ways of making money might still have been open to me; as a discredited bank clerk of fifty, there were none, though I tried everywhere. We moved out of our house and went to a cheap flat in a poor part of the city. My wife took in sewing. One daughter went to live with a relative in the country; the other ran away at seventeen and married. Ernest, my boy, got a position with a broker, an old friend of mine. We managed to exist. I cooked while my wife ran the machine, swept, took her work home, and carried brown paper parcels from the corner grocery. I tried to save her all I could, but I longed for a man's work.

I was beginning to get up courage again when that fatal blow fell which made an old man of me. I have found that there is no escaping the Law under which we all live; it takes its awful toll of us in one way or another. My bright boy, Ernest, was discovered robbing the stamp box, of a small amount indeed, but the fact remained. Ernest was a *thief!* My God—how that word rang through me! A thief! My erstwhile friend, the broker, sent for me and told me, kindly but explicitly.

The first word my boy said to me when I was alone with him was:

“Don’t tell Mother.”

And I answered:

“No, she must never know.”

He wept with my arms around him. We knew without speaking that there could be no help from her. Yet she *must* have suspected something, then and since!

Ernest got another place and was discharged after a few months, for the same reason. He drifted off and it is long since we have heard from him.

Once the newsdealer at the corner hired me to make up his books for him. I was tremulously eager at the prospect of doing a man's work once more. I dressed myself carefully, and walked to the store with a firm step. But my head would not stay clear. I made mistake after mistake, the old vertigo attacked me. I went home tottering.

The consolations of religion even have forsaken me lately. I, who used to feel so sure of my place by the Throne of Grace, and in the Great and Exulting Company of the Redeemed, have no joy in the assurance now; it seems somehow beside the mark. I seldom go to church, and when I do, it is to slip into a back seat and out again before the perfunctory words of cordiality greet me.

I am always thinking of Ernest, my boy so far away. In my thoughts I am fighting for him as I fought for the little boy Jake was hurting so long ago.

As I walk to and from the corner grocery with my paper parcels of butter and sugar—living is terribly high these days!—I find myself repeating over and

over to myself: "Lord, help *my boy!* I don't want anything for myself any more; only have mercy on my boy. Keep him straight—my life is over, but *keep him straight. Don't visit my sins on him!*"

I get strangely confused at times. The other day I thought I saw my friend of long ago, the young priest, coming down the street toward me. There was something in his kind eyes—— But when I looked again he was gone.

THE SONG OF COURAGE

PRELUDE

IT WAS in Milan, the day after the wonderful operatic success of the new singer—that triumph which has since become so assured! and I had sought the interview.

We had but just met that morning, and I was leaving for New York on the morrow. . . . She lay on the bed in the high-windowed, heavily curtained hotel bedroom, a strangely motionless little heap in a brown dressing gown, with relaxed arms and hands; the eyes shining out of her small, deeply worn face revealed, by a startling contrast with her physical exhaustion, the eagerness and energy of an indomitable spirit.

The business of the interview had gradually merged into the unexpected meeting of two souls. . . . I found myself telling all my desires and perplexities to a comprehension that seemed illimitably embracing—embracing is the word; it was as if she had her arms around me, to give me such tender yet helpful comfort as I'd never had before. Her sympathy led to my involuntary questions. She seemed something wonderful and precious that I couldn't let go of before some further insight was vouchsafed me, in penalty else of eternal regret afterward for the loss.

After she once began to speak—slowly and tentatively at first—we both, I think, lost count of time. . . .

It was only a month later that the news of her death reached me.

M. S. C.

THE SONG OF COURAGE

NOW that the triumphant end has really come, or the beginning—whichever you choose to call it—now that my great song has been sung at last, it does seem a relief to speak, and to a stranger. I couldn't tell it all to my darling Erla, it would hurt her too much. After all, we often tell the deepest things about us only to strangers, because they seem in a way just disembodied interest and sympathy; our friends know us, and the people we are telling about, too well to be able to see clearly. And it makes it different, doesn't it, meeting this way in a foreign country?

You seem so young and so pretty to be earning your living alone here; I have always loved pretty people, though even in my best days I have never been anything but a plain little thing myself. That is what I heard my husband say about me to a friend of his a couple of months after we were married:

“She's a plain little thing; but she's a dear.”

My husband himself was a very handsome man—perhaps that was really one reason that I married him. And I knew I wasn't pretty, but oh, I would have liked him to think that I was!

Many people's lives, if you may judge from what they say, seem to have consciously begun on a grown-

up plane when they reached a certain age, or a higher school, or were given responsibilities in the world. Before that they were just children, thinking and understanding as such; a period railed off in those ways from the after-part of their existence.

It was different with me. My life—that conscious life that is a part of me now—began when I was a very little girl; I can't remember myself without it. I led a very ordinary, normal existence on the farm, but I had always thoughts and feelings, perceptions and divinations, that are not expected of a child and that no one suspected in me—the kind of thoughts and perceptions I have now.

I was brought up to believe that my father and mother were the source, under Providence, of all wisdom and goodness; but I knew perfectly well at the age of six that my father and mother were often cross and unjust, and that to be cross and unjust was just as bad in a grown person as in a child. And although we were a household brought up in the daily reading of the Bible—perhaps for that very reason, for children who are brought up on the Book get perforce a different outlook on life—I knew perfectly well that we were all encompassed by a great mystery, and that if I had the courage to jump off the cliff I would find out something I could never discover if I lived on top of ground for a thousand years.

And at that same age I promised myself that if I were ever grown up and had children of my own, that no matter how much work I had to do I would always look at my little boys and girls as if I were

glad to see them when they ran into the room, even if they brought mud on their shoes; and that, no matter how tired I was, I would never say sharply: "Go away, I can't attend to you now," when they came up to me trustingly.

I'm not one of those women whom you'd call naturally fond of children, but I can say that among all the things I did or didn't do for mine later on, they never, at least, missed being mothered when they wanted it. Many a time when I've been as tired out as ever my poor mother was, that effort toward a child has rested me anew, I got back so much more for the little that I gave!—but that's a thing lots of mothers don't know.

Our farm life was the kind that you've always heard about—work not only from morning until night, but almost from morning until morning. Long after even the last of the hired men had been fed and the dishes washed and the fields lay quiet under the moon, there were always "critters" to be seen to, chores done, fires kept up, and endless sewing on my mother's part with her worn and knotted fingers—the thousand and one little ways of toil, beginning again long before daylight; and there was always a sense of irritated depression in the air in all this unending effort of the elders, because at the best there was no money in it, and at the worst there was a bottomless loss.

Yet there was the daily routine to keep things together—existence, even with this shadow, wasn't aimless. We children—there were five of us—were

busy enough with "chores," but we had our schooling; we were not *too* hard worked.

And though I was a plain little brown, round-cheeked, freckled-face child, I always had a separate life of my own—perhaps set in motion by the daily Bible reading in our household; the magnificent words in it sometimes touch strange chords beyond our knowing. I used to go off by myself with a doll or a book or a bit of sewing for a pretence—so clever children are at hiding themselves!—and sit in the corner of a little wood down the slope with a green "fairy ring" in front of me. We had an old Irish woman working for us once, and she had told me that round green places in the grass were "fairy rings." It was a fairy ring, but God made it.

When I stood there, it was as if I were miles away from everyone. I sang to the leaves and the blades of grass and the little white clouds far, far above; I sang songs to them, in words I made up myself, perfectly disconnected and unmeaning, yet that had a strange and deep connection with some great and unknown power in myself—something I didn't know how to express; something—I put it as I felt it then childishly—something that was just between me and God; the same God that the children of Israel talked to. It was a comfort to feel that He knew. It was a joy to get off by myself and play, childlike, with the fanciful, yet real, consciousness of that power. People said that I grew absent-minded, carelessly indifferent—I wondered sometimes that they couldn't see that I had another world to live in.

I could always sing, even as a baby. My parents were proud of this, and when I was very little I performed at all the school celebrations and at the concerts of the Methodist Church. One day when I was about eleven years old, I heard a woman, a boarder from the city, say after one of the school performances:

“That child has a wonderful voice. If she is trained she will make a great singer.”

I shall never forget the words—it was like having a door opened into heaven. Music had always set me quivering with a sense of beauty that was almost too great to bear. After that all my dreams, all my talks to myself were of singing—in a wonderful, great hall, filled with rows on rows of people, a glittering crowd, with princes and princesses among them, and in that final intoxication of joy, when my voice should soar and soar far up above, carrying the souls of all that crowd with it, I would feel the meeting with something that was Divine. As I grew, the dream grew; I filled it out with details; I planned for the means toward it, no matter what the difficulties in the path.

In that strange way that sometimes happens, the very difficulties themselves seemed to make opportunities. My poor, hard-worked mother died; when I was seventeen my father married again; before another year was over he sold the farm and moved to the far West. His new wife did not want me with them, and said so; I was old enough to look after myself.

My two brothers were already married, living at a

distance and struggling to make a living; my older sister had gone as a missionary to Japan. I had not known before how to leave the nest; but when I was pushed out I learned to fly. Young and inexperienced as I was I had dreamed to some purpose; I got the address of the lady from New York who had praised my voice six years before, and, by some enormous stroke of good fortune, found her.

No one could ever have looked less like a possible great singer than I!—a little country girl with a round face and a shabby black hat and jacket. But Mrs. Stanford had friends among great musicians; she took me to the greatest conductor of the day—I have never known any one so much a part of music as he, a man as kind as he was great—and made me sing for him. I was terribly afraid as I began, but as I went on I came suddenly into my other world: I stood with my feet in the fairy ring, singing up to the blue sky above me, and to the Power of which I was a part. When I finished, the two who were listening said nothing, but the great man held out his hand and shook my friend's hand, and they looked into each other's eyes.

After that my work was cut out for me. My brothers—poor boys, they had little enough!—sent me the tiny sum each week that they could spare—enough to pay for a dingy hall room for me; my musical education was provided for.

Life was very different for girls alone in town thirty-odd years ago from what it is now. There were comparatively very few living that way, so

few that there was little chance for one of finding comrades easily; there was none of the conventionalized Bohemianism that obtains so largely at the present day.

The landlady of the boarding place which Mrs. Stanford had found was a good soul who was supposed to look out for me—and did, as well as she could. I met some women, mostly older than I, at my classes, but I was shy and not attractive looking—I never became really a city person, I was always just a little country girl—and our intercourse never became anything permanent. And I needed no companionship in those days; I was music-mad, drunk with it, filled with that sense of it that leaves room for nothing else. I lived gloriously in my inner world; I practised interminably; when I was not practising I was studying the theory and history of the great masterpieces of my art. I became used to the fact that when I sang even those women who didn't like me became silent, and that people pointed me out when I entered the conservatory.

At the end of three years I had made one of the grand triumphant steps of my dreams—I won a prize, and was sent to Paris to complete my course for grand opera.

But before that something had happened to take away from that joy of achieving—as is so often, so very often the case, when we have at last attained what we have planned for!—so that it is the same and not yet the same.

I had met Paul.

II

PAUL was from Vermont; he had come to New York about the same time that I had, but it was only the year before I left that he happened to take a room in the same house where I boarded and we got acquainted with each other. He was a small clerk in a downtown wholesale house. He was an extremely dignified, a very handsome young man, with dark, flashing eyes, a low white forehead under his thick dark hair, and very white teeth.

He sang in the chorus of a large amateur singing society of great vogue in those days, and as I sang in it also for practice, he fell into the habit of escorting me to and from the rehearsals.

I think most of the girls there were ready to fall in love with him, on the strength of his looks, but he always seemed, at least, to be quite unconscious of the stir and flutterings that his presence caused; if he noticed them, it was only to increase a sort of country-bred shyness that mingled with a country-bred conceit under his dignified exterior. He felt uneasily that they expected attentions from him that he didn't know how to give. I alone expected nothing.

From the first I became his confidante. He was very lonely, my poor Paul! He told me about the home and the good food that he missed; about the small makeshifts, laughable and otherwise, that his small salary necessitated; about his aspirations in a business way and the set-backs and jealousies

which he had already encountered. He was morbidly afraid of criticism. Did I say that people always confide in me? My dear, I have been the recipient of more personal histories and of more troubles than I could ever begin to sum up.

But from the first, although I didn't realize it, I think Paul fell in love with me. What agitations, what whirling-brained, sleepless, yet not unhappy nights I went through the month before I sailed! Often as he had told me that he loved me, I had been so bent on my career, I was so much a part of music, that I hadn't wanted to listen to the suggestion that I was giving way to anything else. And he wouldn't hold me back from my career. It was all very harrowing and delicious and high-minded and young, but he suffered more than I—far more!

I sailed, and left him standing on the dock looking after me. Yet though I cried so hard after I had seen the last of him, something in me was glad to get away, too. The strain had been too much—I couldn't have stood it any longer. And though Paul had confided so much to me, he had never had any of my confidences, because I knew secretly—but so well—that he hadn't wanted any of them. No one had ever cared to hear anything of that inner life of mine, and Paul was no exception.

When I could touch the keys of the piano and let my voice blend with them, there would come at strange, unexpected moments that exulting sense of being mysteriously isolated with the Highest, and part of the Highest, and part of the harmony which

I had heard even as a little child. . . . I have always wondered how people live who have no fairy ring to stand in.

Those three years in Paris—golden years! Homesick as I was at times for Paul I was glad I had them—so glad! But for them I would never have known in the flesh the possibilities of my art. They were immortal years; they filled me with an insatiate flame. How I worked and how I sang! I made my small body strong; I lived frugally, I bathed, I exercised, I worked with that absolute precision and ardour of routine which alone makes for the highest purpose, the highest power.

There was almost always a disappointment visible in everyone when they first saw me—I was used to that!—and then the sudden, swift attention when I began to sing, and the silence after I had ended. I was to be the greatest singer yet. My masters made only one proviso: I could take no liberties with my voice nor with my strength; I had no large and naturally robust frame to fall back on. I must live within the strict limitations that encompassed me now.

And all the time I wrote every week to Paul, trying to help and comfort and sympathize, to be everything I could. I loved him dearly and carried always with me a sense of responsibility for his welfare. The month was fixed for my appearance as Marguerite in Gounod's "Faust"; I had been kept back strictly from the public, and only rumours of my wonderful voice—that's the way they put it,

as beautiful in its quality as in its strength—carefully circulated. I tasted all the preliminary sweets of success in the anxious excitement of the masters and the manager who was responsible for my appearance. One can never foretell what may make for failure in even the most promising *prima-donna*; no one could foretell here, I least of all! . . .

The week before my contract was signed I had a letter from my poor Paul—a last, despairing appeal to me to come to him; he was ill, alone, he needed me *now*. It was a bitter, anguished appeal from the heart to one slipping finally out of reach; a call to consider the things of the heart before it was too late for both of us. Couldn't I love and sing, too? And what was any song without love?

Well! I did not sign the contract. I passed through a terrible week of storming fury on the part of those who had built their hopes on my career, and had given their work toward it—Mrs. Stanford telegraphed me sternly from Italy—she had a right to be angry, Heaven knows!

Many people tell me how differently they would have lived their lives if they had known what they know now; I'm not sure that I can say that; I can't assert that I would have decided differently even if I had known—for I *did* know!—although apparently and to myself I was only abdicating for the moment. I couldn't think that my career was really given up for all time; it should be taken up without fail later. And I was horribly worked up, emotional, unbalanced by excitement and Paul's need of me—yet

through all, away underneath everything, I *think* I knew. And even if I had really. . . . My life has been a succession of what Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney—I read her books and loved them when I was a girl—calls “the next things.” My going to Paul came imperatively “next.”

You know the quotation: “O Art, my Art, thou’rt much, but Love is more!” I don’t think I could ever have said that; I don’t think the kind of love I felt at the time *was* more. It was simply that Paul loved and needed me and I was young and a woman; suddenly I, who had held out so easily, couldn’t remain stone to his appeal any longer; something in me responded whether I would or not, something I had never reckoned on; I just went. If I had stayed—well, who can tell? I might have had no more of an artistic career even then; I might have taken diphtheria as one poor girl I knew did, and died in a week. We never know what our “next thing” may be.

Paul was somehow strangely older, strangely thinner, strangely *less* someway than I had imagined him—that was my first half-sinking, half-frightened impression before Love entered and absorbed the field of vision.

III

PEOPLE have such different ways of happiness, haven’t they? Mine didn’t consist in a daily continuously happy state, such as one reads about and such as is the experience of some sheltered souls.

Most of us have to be satisfied with those single brilliant flashes of happiness that leave a reflected glow on the way ahead after they've passed by. And for that first year—well, I had some of those sweetly illuminative flashes, although just after our marriage Paul lost his position, and it was a long, long time before he got another.

There began soon after our honeymoon was over a struggle that has never ended until now; a mighty struggle that always—until now—seemed pitifully disproportionate to the result.

We lived in a little bit of a two-story house in a row in a straggling, unimportant suburb. I was terribly sorry for his disappointment in the collapse of his firm and the loss of his position, and was anxious to show him how little I minded the temporary stress. I threw myself into the breach with ardour. I got a place to sing in a church choir—Paul had an invincible dislike to my having anything to do with the stage—and gave singing lessons at a low price to a few pupils whom I managed to get through the good offices of the organist.

It bothered me somewhat that there was a slight huskiness in my voice, brought on by the dampness of the cottage when we first went into it, and the lapse of my regular routine. It bewildered me to have my own expensive musical education bring such a small return.

Like most girls brought up on a farm, I had never been trained to cook properly or do housework well. I had done only "chores," odd jobs that led to no

further accomplishment in the same line. I could bring the flour and set out the pie board, but I couldn't make the bread or pie. Then in the six years of my musical education I had done nothing whatever in this line. I kept house, therefore, very badly at first, with an immense amount of misdirected exertion; but I learned.

Paul was always sweet and good-natured over my mistakes; he ate burnt food cheerfully, and went without his coffee uncomplainingly if I forgot to order it; his deprivations didn't worry him, but neither did it distress him in the least that I was also obliged to eat burnt food and go without coffee after my unavailing toil.

There are some things that give me a strange and awful wonder when I think of them—things I could not bear to own to myself without that strained wringing of the heart; it's only because you are a stranger that I am speaking now—for the first time. My husband was sweet and kind and unfailingly gentle, unfailingly loving, but it never, then or afterward, seemed to distress him that it was I who bore the burden of the household as well as of our maintenance. Home was naturally the place for a woman.

Once a man he had invited to the house was amazed to find that I was a girl he had known at the Conservatory in Paris; he said: "*You, here!*" as one might speak to a queen who had given up her throne. Paul never seemed to realize that I had given up anything. He took it as simply that I should like to

work for him as that he would have liked to work for me; that was fine, in a way; but in the years that followed there were three consecutively in which he could get no regular position whatever, and, except for a few odd jobs at bookkeeping, contributed nothing to our subsistence.

He was always willing enough to work—or he was at first—but he didn't know how to ask for it; he sat around home most of the day and read the papers or played with the children. Then for two years he was ill and helpless, and though he got about again he never really recovered his strength. Although I didn't realize it then, I think now that he had never been strong and that this accounted for his seeming lack of initiative.

I gave more lessons than ever; I was fortunate in getting pupils. I not only did the cooking and the housework, but I shovelled the snow and tended the furnace and planted and hoed our tiny garden, and I had three children who lived and buried two when they were tiny babies.

I say that I gave lessons at home, charging more for them than before, but I no longer sang in the choir. My voice, my real voice, was gone—you don't have to have a real voice to teach singing! After Pauline's birth I got up too soon and caught cold in some way. Well, it did something to my vocal cords—a sort of partial paralysis. It was well that I had no time to realize it.

There was another thing that made life harder at first—I wasn't naturally a mother. I have found

many women since with the same experience as mine in that regard, but I thought I must be a monster. Those days and nights when I held Pauline in my too-tired, aching young arms—she was a delicate, crying little thing—I used to wonder, like many another young mother before and since, if this was the rapture people wrote about and pictured. It was even strange and agonizing not to be able to be comfortable and happy unless that unresponsive, irresponsible little mite were happy and comfortable also, to feel my soul wrung with solicitude for her whether I was giving a lesson, or whether I had her in my arms; never to have her off my weary mind, day or night.

But after a time this acute stage passed; I loved my little girl—some of those flashes of happiness came to me with her.

A woman I know who isn't married says that women who do not naturally love children often make the best mothers, because they don't take them easily as just children, to be played with and caressed, but because of their own conscious limitations make a real effort to understand and provide for them as little human beings. Perhaps in a way she was right; at any rate, that was the way I considered mine. I did really try to make them happy, those sweet little guests in my home who had come there without their asking. I tried never to take advantage of them because they were children; I never asked them to do things because I didn't want to do the things myself. I remembered the promise of

my own early days, and when they came to me for bread I tried never to give them a stone. I tried; one can never know if one has succeeded; children are such deep, deep mysteries, it is hard to know what goes on in their minds; they see with such an awful, instinctive clearness.

Jack was born a little more than a year after Pauline, and there were two babies to take care of before I had learned how to look after one. Then those other times—but I can't speak of them. The worst of it was, perhaps, that even in the midst of my grief it seemed despairingly best that those two little new-born souls should escape at once from such a hard-pressed life. I did not see how I could possibly tend them, or keep them from harm.

But one thing I must stop and say right here: All this sounds a sordid, wretched recital, as if I, who had the chief part in this domestic drama, were soaked in a sort of hopeless misery. My dear, we live our own lives so gradually, from day to day . . . do you know, I never once thought this was the way my life was being lived; these were only temporary phases and situations of grinding stress. My voice, even, was only gone temporarily. I never, even to myself, in my darkest moments, thought: "This is all; it is all I am ever going to have." Always I knew that there was more! Why, I should have died outright if I had thought the other!

That feeling of something very great that was mine to express some day came to me at moments, bringing that exquisite uplifting, inexpressibly

dear; a very little thing could bring it to me, as when I struck certain chords on the piano and dreamed into them, singing softly in harmony, or when I saw the harmony of a rosy cloud floating across the blue sky, or the sunlight sparkling across ice-clad branches or shining through the first spring budding of the yellow-flowered bush in our yard. There was a something in me beyond and apart from my life as a wife or a mother or a wage-earner—something that was as truly I, yet which nobody knew!—something, as I felt when a child, between me—and God. Always, in the old childish speech, there were times still when I could stand with my feet in the fairy ring.

And then—what strange ways God has of making real mothers of us!—and then—Erla came.

Never had I so nearly lost my place in the fairy ring as in those months before she was born. Never had I felt so passionately protesting. It was the impossible thing to happen at that particular time. My poor Paul had fallen ill again before she came; I had everything I could do, and far far more. I had moments of actual frenzy, amounting almost to madness.

It happens so often to us stupid, stupid mortals that that against which we protest beforehand the most vehemently turns out to be one of our greatest blessings. Like many another woman, the child whose coming was the most intensely repudiated was the one who afterward brought me the most exquisite pleasure. In a sense I loved no one of my

children more than another; in illness my anxiety was the same for each, my care for health and happiness always as unremitting. Both Pauline and Jack had been nervous, delicate babies, ever more of a care than a refreshment, their small, precious existences always haunting me with a dread fear. But Erla from the first was different; she was such a healthy, happy little thing, she would lie in her crib for hours at a time as good as gold, when I was busy; whenever she saw my face she smiled.

From a tiny little thing her love for me was different from that which the other two showed; if I were out late she feared that "something might happen to mamma"; she had strange little endearing, voiceless ways of showing care and sympathy for me. Erla, by some divine intuition, always knew what mamma wanted—it was so strange to have any one look out for me, to have any one see when I was tired. It was Erla who brought me my slippers when I came in from giving a lesson, and tried to unbutton my shoes.

When Erla, with those baby-angel eyes of hers resting on my worn face, climbed up into my lap and patted my cheeks with her soft hands, saying: "Dear, pretty Mamma! Mamma is so beau-ty-ful!" she brought an exquisite wonder and refreshment to my heart. I have never been beautiful to any one but Erla.

Isn't it strange, no matter how great, or fortunate, or miserable a woman is, to be beautiful to someone makes such a difference! We want that so much.

When Erla stroked my cheek it was as if I had touched the most exquisite chord on the piano and my voice had carried it up to heaven.

She was only a year and a half old when her father died; he loved his children, he was as gentle with them as with everybody—with me most of all. I am thankful that in those last years, at least, I tried to lay no burdens on *him*—I don't think I did. Mine were the shoulders to bear them; whether it *was* right or wrong that the part was mine instead of his was mercifully settled for me by his illness—*then it was right*. It is terrible to have to see that those we love are in the wrong; no matter how wrong we know ourselves to be in many things, we want them to be perfect.

When Paul died, something went out of my life with his spirit and his unfailing gentleness—youth, perhaps you might call it, for want of a better name. He and I had been young together. I found myself going back in my mind, past all that had happened since, to those first years when we had been young together. I was gladder than I had ever been before that I had come back from Paris to him. The children were his as well as mine—and I had Erla!

No one, except those who have experienced it, knows how strange it is to have one's husband taken away—it seems always the kind of thing that cannot happen, it leaves one lost in the world, with no accredited place. There is no one else with whom one has any right to be first.

People were very kind to me in those early days of my bereavement. My brothers, whom I had not

seen for years, came to the funeral; they were changed almost into strangers, grown apart from me, yet for that moment of grief, oddly my brothers still.

Death is a concrete thing, it is a tangible and accredited reason for sorrow. Sorrow that comes from God brings its own comfort; it is not like those terrible, self-brought seasons of mental incapacity and depression in which the will becomes flaccid—seasons in which one is ready to snatch at a straw to save oneself from drowning, only that on those occasions there is never even a straw to catch at.

When one cries out for help in one's weakness, no one wants to help at all—at least I've always found it so! It is only when one is inwardly strong that others stretch out their hands to help us along. Spiritual weakness antagonizes—people fear it, it is such an ugly thing. We have to try and raise ourselves to the plane above to come into communication with our kind. My God! How hard we have to try sometimes! Even our daily repeated strengthening catch-words wear themselves out in course of time; we have to seek others to pump up the power of living into us.

There were always those chords on the piano that I could strike that might bring the sense of power back into me—and for every time in which I struggled out of the slough of despondency, I reached a still higher ground; I had visions. Oh, my fairy ring was still there, that feeling of that inner self in me leaped toward the light more exultingly

than ever; that desire for expression—the need, yes, the power of it—was mine, in a greater degree than ever. I thanked God for the unfulfilled joy of it; in those moments I knew, without questioning, that some day my voice would come back.

IV

IT WAS no new thing for me to have to support the family. When I look back it seems impossible that I could have done so much and in such different kinds of ways—if it were not that so many of us do impossible things. My musical training, my life of routine, had at any rate given me the power and the habit of concentration. But the anguish of all the working lately had been to have to take the time for it from an invalid who needed me. I was free to work as hard as I wanted to now.

I not only had classes in the house; I went to other places, other towns, even. I was lucky at getting and keeping pupils. Pauline and Jack and Erla helped in the house in little ways, as they had for some time, but they had to be educated.

You don't need to be told about those years, sweet years in spite of everything. And—I can't exactly explain it—but much that had hurt in my married life faded away for ever, and left only the sense of love; what was good and sweet in Paul stayed by me. I realized, too, that I might have helped him differently. You see God has always given me the power to enjoy, if I was only strong enough to stand up and hold the gift!

Erla, though the youngest, was the little mother of the family; she was Jack's companion, her quick perception went ahead of Pauline's slower wit; she took care of me always. She had her father's beauty, his thick, curling dark hair, and his clear complexion; she grew up very tall. But though both Jack and Pauline had sweet voices, Erla never would sing; apart from that she was the most sensitive to music of them all.

We think our children belong to us.—When my pretty, delicate, flower-like Pauline was eighteen, she married a man more than forty who was here on a visit from Denver. It was one of those blows—it came upon me like a blow—that are out of all expectancy. Yes, he was well off . . . Pauline was made to be guarded. Yes, he loved her—she has always been happy, I think. I have seen her just six times in twelve years. You might think it strange that when she was rich I should still keep on working hard . . . she was so young when she married, she was only used to taking things, child-fashion, from mother, not giving. It is I, since, who have kept on sending her the little love-presents—trifles that I make myself, pretty collars and ties that can't be bought where she is. At Christmas and on my birthday Pauline and her husband send me a handsome present—a silken down quilt or a fur cloak. Pauline always says:

“I do hope if you want for anything at any time, Mother, that you'll let me know.”

Want for anything! And Pauline has come on *here*

to buy Chippendale furniture and thousand-dollar curtains for her house in Denver, and has seen the way I live! No, I am wrong, she doesn't see; she has the eyes of a child still, to whom mother and mother's house are apart from the rest of the world, complete as they are. It is my fault, I should have taught her better. Erla was the only one of my children who ever saw—but that is no credit to me; it was a divine quality in herself that I couldn't take away. So much that we lack afterward in our children, it is a strange, self-stabbing sort of comfort to think *must* be our own fault.

Jack, my poor Jack, never had any business sense; I haven't either, for that matter, I can only work! Jack wanted to leave the position in which he was getting a few dollars a week to go away as a missionary. I suppose it was a higher aspiration than just helping me. I have never looked forward to a time when my children would take care of me, as many parents do, it seemed as if I must always provide for them; yet this gave me a strange sort of shock.

I told you that I had a sister who was a missionary in Japan; well, she managed it that Jack went out there as a lay-helper; she had been writing to him for some time. I believe he has done much good; they say people love him—my little Jack! He sends me enthusiastic letters, occupied entirely with what he is doing. . . . There's a sort of excitement in working for people when you're not obliged to do it. So I was left alone with Erla.

I've skipped the greatest part of it all, you see.

One day, when Erla was about fifteen, I heard her sing.

V

I REMEMBER it all so vividly! She thought I was out of the house, but I had come in again without her knowing. Late one February afternoon I sat in my bedroom with its shabby, ragged rugs, its mean, yellow-painted furniture, knitting a pair of gray mittens for Jack—he was driving a grocery wagon at the time.

I was unusually tired that afternoon. Jack's minor position in the business world always necessitated an excruciatingly early breakfast, and this had been my morning to get up; Erla insisted on seeing to it on other days, though I did not want her to. My lovely child was growing too fast and studying too late at night for the high school; she was fitting herself to be a teacher.

I had taught all day in town, with but a brief interval for lunch, and with the information that two of my best pupils were to leave unexpectedly. It is singular how one may have all the outward manifestations of success, with the knowledge of the same old ache and anxiety, and the same old grinding strain to bear. I still had pupils, but I had begun lately not to get so much for teaching as I used. My methods had grown old-fashioned, I had no time to keep up with the newer music; it took more to live, and there was always something unforeseen to drag back just as one began to get ahead.

The furnishings of my bedroom had never been replenished since my marriage; they had an indescribably sordid look. I sat by the window; opposite was a row of mean, contracted, shabby white houses, the front yards sodden, but just above was a patch of blue, blue sky with white clouds around it. Anything very beautiful could always set my feet, momentarily at least, in the fairy ring. I have often wondered why most people—in cities, at any rate—look at the sky so little, or seem to get so little pleasure from the sight. And at that moment I heard someone in the room below singing—that voice!—I sat up straight and said: “God in heaven, *what is that?*”

I slid out of my room and down the stairs noiselessly, and through the open doorway of our little parlour I saw my Erla. She was singing from an old English book of songs, open on the piano: “Phyllis has such charming graces.” You know it, perhaps. She stood there in her short plaid frock with her back to me, her head held high, the thick braid of her dark hair falling below her knées, and her hands clasped behind her.

That golden voice! Whether low or swelling high, so round, so full, with such a divine quality—even in the light shades and trills of the song, still round and full—but you have heard it! Nothing could ever add to the quality of it—she has learned confidence—she was so timid at first that she couldn’t sing a note if she knew any one was listening; she has learned many things, but nothing has ever added to

that wonderful quality. It was a voice that came straight from the highest. Once in centuries there is a voice like that.

I crept upstairs again and fell to weeping; I wept in torrents. Oh, I couldn't begin to tell you how I felt. It was like dying and being resurrected, the same and yet not the same, and not being used to the strange new body. I realized, as never, never before, what I had lost! I seemed to be equally torn for myself and for the child who had the Gift. And I made a vow then——

When Erla came upstairs and saw me face downward on the bed, she flung herself down beside me, holding me tight in her young arms, with her cheek pressed against mine.

“Why do you cry, Mother?” she whispered pitifully. “Why do you cry? I didn't want you to hear me sing, I thought you were out.” And then: “Oh, Mother, you'll get your own voice back some day, I know you will; I've prayed for it ever since I was a little bit of a girl.”

My little Erla! But even to her I couldn't speak of that.

That night we talked it all out together. It was only within a year that she had found her voice; but always—so strange it is that we may live so close to a child, and never know the child's inner heart!—since she was very little she had sung all the songs she heard me teaching, “in her mind”—it was the only way she could explain it, but it must have been to her something like practising with one's fingers on a

clavier which makes no sound. She couldn't get courage to make the sounds with her voice, she was so afraid someone would hear it; she had an agonizing shyness about being heard; but after awhile she had sung whenever she was alone. When one is timid about playing on any instrument, the consciousness may affect the execution, but the instrument remains the same. With the voice it is different; it is itself the instrument to be affected, to lose its tone, its power with anything that affects the singer. When I sang I forgot myself entirely, whatever voice I had could be counted on without fail, but with Erla it was always the opposite.

Well, the plan of her studying to be a teacher in the public school was abandoned at once, though she fought against giving up; in a few more years she might be earning forty dollars a month, and she had so longed to be a help to me! The very idea of singing in public terrified her. "In half a dozen years you may be earning four thousand a month, or even a week," I told her.

My dear, I found that times were different than when I was a girl; there were so few American-born singers then that one with a real voice had some prominence. I was a rarity; Mrs. Stanford and my dear Master felt that in me they had a concealed treasure. But there are far too few patrons now for the hundreds of girls with voices to exploit; there was nobody to make Erla's way for her but me.

When Pauline came on from her home she was interested, as much as the child could be, in something

that wasn't her own child-life—and she gave Erla twenty-five dollars for her birthday to help on with the lessons; the lessons cost me eighty dollars a quarter. Pauline was proud of Erla, but she didn't understand. It was natural that mother should look after her girlies. You may think it foolish, as well as strange, that I never asked Pauline for a penny in all those years, either toward Erla's musical education or for my living. I think maybe I have been unjust to Pauline in not asking, in defrauding her of the giving—but I couldn't—I was too proud. Everything was there for her to see if she would have seen it—and if she didn't. . . .

It is hard for many people to see that others may be in need if they themselves are not. It was, after all, my fault; I was too proud to do what would have been really best for her, even if it hurt me. I sometimes get at least that stabbing comfort of knowing that it was partly my own fault.

VI

IT WAS strangely like and yet unlike my old life over again, those years when Erla was learning to sing. But she was in no boarding house alone; she was with me, her mother. She went to town every day for her lessons and practising; I didn't pretend to teach her. But every night she came home to me, except those nights when I met her in town and took her to the opera, and we came out together, past midnight, to our house and bed.

I sometimes caught sight of our two selves in a big

mirror in the foyer, as we walked through—Erla, tall and beautiful, with her long dark hair wound around her lovely head, her long throat, her young swelling figure in her tight-fitting dark blue “tailor” suit—that I’d cut and sewed with my own fingers—and I, the plain, thin little woman in the black skirt and jacket. I heard someone speak of me once as “that little middle-aged woman with the young eyes.”

It gave me a curious feeling as if I’d been found out. I knew, that in myself, in spite of love and birth and death, and care and sorrow, and grinding work for all these years, I knew that in myself I was as young as that look in my eyes, as eager for expression as ever, as eager to live my own life as I dreamed it. Even if you’re a mother, it’s strange how much you keep on being your own self still.

We women, we talk all our days—we talk too much! We are always trying to say something, to get at something; there is so much in us that we never can express, we wonder what use it is, and why the desire is given us.

Those years when Erla and I were alone together we both worked tensely at our different tasks. She was not actively demonstrative, but she had all the little ways of love and understanding; she pulled the blind down to shade my eyes before I realized that the sun was shining in; she walked to and from the train when she was in town so that she might save her carfare to buy me a little package of chocolates, or a flower; she wouldn’t get a new hat for herself until I could buy one, too; and when she dressed or

undressed, I had to go and stay in the room with her so that we might have those precious minutes at least in which to talk over all that had happened since we had talked last. She told me every word of praise her masters gave her religiously; she knew that that was what my soul lived on. Erla had all the little ways of love that feed the heart.

It distressed her that I had still to be the wage-earner; I had to keep her purpose inflexibly before her or she would have given up the future many times for the present need. For the rest, we pinched and saved in every way we could. I trained her in the routine that had been mine in Paris, and let no household duties interfere with it, that she might have the highest measure of health and strength with which to back up her voice.

Her greatest stumbling block was her constitutional shyness. To get confidence, and the ease and repose that come from it, was the thing she had to strive most for. There is always something to stand in the way; with me it was always my plainness, my insignificance, my utter lack of any presence. Erla had presence; but it was a question whether she would ever be able really to sing alone in public—that is, sing as she could. Many voices have gone to pieces under that strain before now—they haven't been able to fulfil the heavenly promise they gave; we have all known that. And afterward, when they sing, the voice isn't there the same as before the failure; something that seemed to be in it goes after it has been smirched by the powers of Fear and of Weakness.

So that was our only uneasiness. If after all this tremendous uphill effort there was to be another failure, though of a different kind, at the end of it—if Erla was to suffer as I had done——! I think no matter what I was doing I was invariably praying, praying, praying in all kinds of ways; as the humblest, most needy, most undeserving of sinners, and then again with the confident, proud claiming of one's intention with that of the Highest; praying, as I said, in all kinds of ways, as if by chance to catch His attention by one method if not by another—to catch the Omnipotent coöperation that alone makes our striving competent. One cannot be daily in communication with a great force without acquiring power oneself. From that inner intensity I gained an outer calm, a sureness, a repose. There was a life at stake, and I must not falter.

VII

WHEN it was ultimately arranged, after long consideration and preparation, that Erla should go abroad to Vienna to study, with a couple of other young women, she wept and implored me piteously to go with her; she couldn't bear to leave me behind. It was a terribly hard thing to send her away so far, but I had to stay home and earn the money. I could see no way of earning it over there.

In those last four years I had saved a little; I borrowed the rest—enough to take Erla over, and to begin on—from the grocer in our suburb, now grown to a large place, whose children I once taught, and

one of whom had since died. Among all the people I have known in musical circles, or of social prominence, I have never met one who seemed to realize that I ever needed any special help, even when we went through our most crucial seasons of poverty, except this one man. I think I had a quiet manner that seemed self-sufficient; I never talked of my own affairs. But Mr. Dalton once, when it had been difficult for me to pay his bill, had come forward and in the plain matter-of-fact way which shows the most delicate kindness, had suggested that everyone in the business world was apt to get into difficulties once in awhile, and that if I needed money at any time he would be glad to lend it to me—if he had it—with no security but my word. I had never taken advantage of his offer until now, but the mere fact of his kindness and faith in me had been indescribably heartening.

I was glad, for one reason, to have Erla go, because I had to work so much harder than I had let her know, and it began to be more and more difficult to keep things from her.

You know how conditions that seem to be permanent change. After my pupils had gradually melted away, I had lectured on music in a couple of schools, and I held the post of secretary to a musical society. I had picked up typewriting, and that helped. If you once get in the way of earning a living, there is always something you can find to do—you get used to burrowing through any narrow tunnel, mole-like, forcing a further opening as you

proceed. In spite of doubts and hesitations, and obstacles and impossibilities, and the almost constant feeling of failure, I have always managed to keep on.

Before Erla left I knew—though she did not—that one of those periods of wholesale change had begun; the musical society was about to disband; one school gave up the musical lectures and the other engaged a man for the next season in my place. I tried for nothing more of the kind. When Erla left I took lodgers; I cooked, swept, scrubbed; I took in plain sewing and fine washing; I made cake and salad dressing for exchanges, and in odd moments knitted baby socks. Many a night I have worked until two o'clock in the morning that Erla's cheques might go to her regularly, and I hardly felt whether it was dawn or dark.

And I had in that time some of my most exquisite flashes of happiness; it was almost as if I had a premonition of what was to happen. I had always been fond of beautiful things, but I took a fresh joy in sunsets, in the shimmering of lights across the snow, in the swaying of green leaves, and white clouds in a blue sky—things that come in the way of everyone—full of a beauty that raises the strain of courage in one's heart. I couldn't listen to music any more—it tore at something in me.

I had never been much of a reader, but I took to reading a couple of books over and over. One of them was "Walden," by Thoreau—that was almost like being out under the sky; and one was "Kidnapped," by Stevenson; I suppose you know it.

You may think it was an odd kind of a book for me to like! But the people in it were always brave—simply brave, through all discouragements, as if it were the only thing to be. I seemed to get a new means of life out of it all. Some of my youth with Paul seemed to have come back again. My brothers wrote to me, briefly and awkwardly, yet as brothers still. There was a sweetness in the relationship.

I had my children's letters—dear letters from my dear children, Pauline and Jack—full of all that they were doing. Pauline had no children, but her husband was very good to her; bless him for that! She was a happy child herself. Sometimes I had the joy of sending tiny cheques to Jack. And I had my letters from Erla, not only filled with what she was doing, but with thought for me. She was succeeding—though not quite sure enough of herself yet. Sometimes she couldn't help being afraid that after all—— But I never wavered in my thought of her.

Those months, those years—they flew; but when the time drew near for her first appearance in grand opera in Milan—when the date was really set—all of a sudden, for the first time in my life, I found I could work no longer. Almost as swiftly as I am telling about it I arranged to leave the house with another woman, and go over myself, without letting Erla know. I spare you the details. I hadn't meant to do it, but I *had* to go—it was as if I were "called." Yes, and I *was* called!

I didn't even tell Erla when I arrived; the ship was late and I reached Milan only the last evening, a cou-

ple of hours before the performance. I had cabled for a seat in the front row in the opera house the day I sailed. It was as if I were on fire!

You saw Erla last night and the crowded, glittering house, the King and Queen in the royal box. It was a triumph when she first came forward on the stage, and her loveliness seemed to make an atmosphere around her; why, she was so beautiful that the audience applauded involuntarily, didn't they? They were kind and encouraging when she began to sing. But she was frightened, you could see her tremble—her voice trembled, too. Erla couldn't sing off the note if she tried, but her voice trembled—it wasn't sure.

I suffered in those moments—that next half hour. . . . I couldn't begin to tell you how I suffered! What availed all my life, all my love, all my struggles, all my prayers if I couldn't help her now? To be a mother, and not to be able to help! It is criminal not to know how to help one's children in their need!

I had feared that my presence might distract Erla, unnerve her, make her conscious, if she saw me. But now I wrote a little note on a slip of paper torn from my play bill and got an usher to take it for me to Erla. He was going to refuse, but he took it when I said I was her mother. I told her where to look for me.

And when she came on again—you were there—you heard her, but you didn't see her eyes leap to mine, you didn't know that in all that glittering, gorgeous house she was singing for a little brown old

woman with wrinkled face and knotted hands, wrapped in a white silk cloak. . . . She sang—her voice uncertain still at first—then gaining, gaining in strength, in tone, in volume, in some heavenly, unspeakable quality—God in heaven! You only heard *her*, but it was *I* who sang! She and I knew. From that first moment my voice had leapt to meet and blend with hers, to sustain it, to carry it up, up, up to the Gates Above, in ecstasy. My lips did not move, but it was my voice that carried. . . . I stood with my feet in the fairy ring at last, in the consciousness of that fullness of created power. I stood in the fairy ring at last, with my voice going up to God!

THE END

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